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RETROREVIVAL
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ISOMETRIC GAME?



DARRAN JONES

Diablo for me. It introduced me to the joys of dungeon delving and, thanks to the likes of *Torchlight*, I'm still adventuring in the perspective now.

Expertise:
Steering the helm of an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Half-Life
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

I've always had a real soft spot for Denton's *Where Time Stood Still*. I remember being enthralled and amazed by the scope of its isometric world.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Vanquish
Favourite game of all time:
Vanquish



JASON KELK

The most fun I've ever had in isometric 3D has to be *Action Biker* on either the C64 or Atari 8-bit.

Expertise:
Swearing at broken machine code
Currently playing:
Vorpal (XBLIG)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

Marble Madness. Amazing to think what started as a mini-golf game turned into a beautiful abstract time-attack game with perfect trackball controls.

Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit (iPad)
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

Batman. Who couldn't resist playing the Caped Crusader? A major triumph for Jon Ritman.

Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Call Of Duty: Black Ops
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

The shimmering majesty of *Crystal Castles*. A game full of secrets and short cuts, with a sweet nod to the perspective-twisting work of Escher.

Expertise:
The Delta Of Venus
Currently playing:
Def Jam Rapstar
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



MARTYN CARROLL

As a Speccy boy I'm spoilt for choice. *Alien 8*, *Head Over Heels* and *Where Time Stood Still* are personal faves, though *The Great Escape* is the one I played the most.

Expertise: Games that make blip-blip sounds
Currently playing:
Super Mario All-Stars
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DAVIES

Mine was *Landstalker* for the Mega Drive. I also had *Lady Stalker* for the Super NES but that was garbage. I liked *Monster Max* on the Game Boy too – basically *Head Over Heels*.

Expertise: Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Monster Hunter Tri
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts

LOADING...



Have a quick flick through this issue and you'll discover something of a 3D theme going on. Developers have always been obsessed with creating 3D worlds, and the introduction of *Ant Attack* gave gamers something they could really sink their teeth into.

It might not have been the first game to use an isometric setting, but *Ant Attack* was certainly the first time that it felt like you were exploring a proper world. The Stamper brothers' pioneering Filmation technique quickly followed and then the floodgates opened, with all kinds of genres benefiting from the viewpoint.

Gamers craved more and developers were more than happy to cater for their evolving tastes. Titles like *Elite* had already delivered wireframe visuals to create the illusion of 3D, but polygon techniques quickly developed, with the likes of *Driller* wowing with its visuals.

By the time 16-bit gaming was en vogue, we were spoiled with what 3D games and imaginative developers could treat us to. Today we've access to stunning technology that delivers living worlds that we could only imagine when we were first exploring the isometric walls of Antescher. Join us, then, as we look at the graphical blueprints that shaped the games we now take for granted.

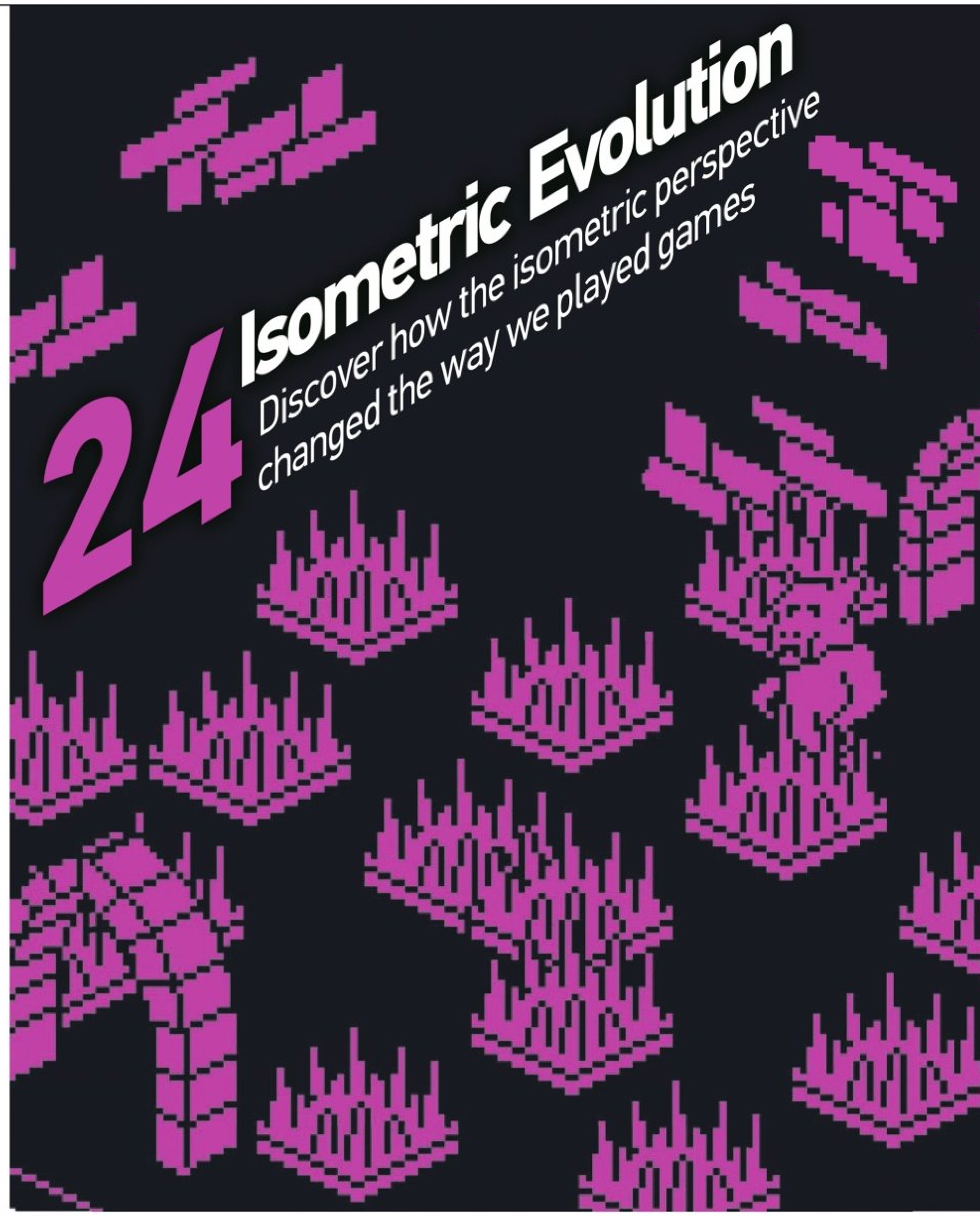
Enjoy the magazine,



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>> Load 86 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…





"You're always impressed by its inventiveness" Darran Jones





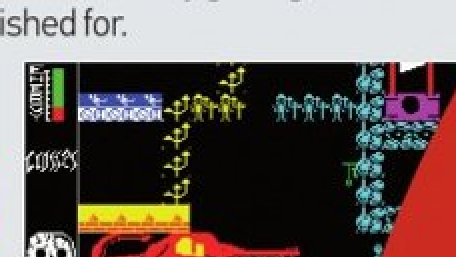




retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL







ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> You can't keep a good console down, and this month Redspotgames is performing a bit of necromancy to bring the Dreamcast back for a last – but probably not last – hurrah with the new shmup, Sturmwind. In addition, we have a new website for retro collectors to show you, and even more classics returning in HD. Aren't we good to you?

✱ CONTENTS







SEGA'S DREAMCAST RECEIVES ANOTHER BRAND NEW SHOOTER

THE CONSOLE THAT REFUSES TO DIE

Sega's classic console just keeps on trucking. While it's no longer supported by Sega itself, companies are still finding solace in the little wonder and titles keep getting released. Redspotgames, which impressed us with its fun top-down rally game, *Rush Rush Rally Racing*, has now turned its attention to the rather impressive-looking *Sturmwind*, a shmup that, in concept at least, has been knocking around since the release of the Atari Jaguar. The continual releases of Dreamcast games – another shooter, *Fast Striker*, slipped completely under our radar and will be reviewed next issue – prove that there's still plenty of life in Sega's super console and also reveals that the shmup genre in particular is alive and well.



Eager to learn more about Duranik's new blaster, we were able to speak to Redspotgames' CEO, Max Scharl, and developer Johannes Graf (pictured) about these exciting-looking titles.

Retro Gamer: So is it true that *Sturmwind* started off as an Atari Jaguar game?
Max Scharl: Well, not really, but it had its origins in *Native*, which was an Atari Jaguar homebrew project.
Only a demo has been released; the game hasn't been completed due to the Jaguar's limited hardware resources. The concepts of the game have been used for *Sturmwind* instead, but the level structure, enemies, graphics, sound and effects are all completely new.

RG: So where did the concept for the game originate?
Johannes Graf: There was not really a concept; we just started and the game grew bigger and bigger. We of course looked at a lot of other games, but we were very clear from the beginning that we didn't want to make a bullet hell shooter.

RG: What games have inspired the direction of *Sturmwind*?
MS: Well, all great shooters from the 16-bit era, especially games such as *Axelay*, *Wings Of Death*, *Lethal Xcess*, *Blood Money*, *R-Type* and *Gradius*.

RG: What will *Sturmwind* offer over previous DC shooters?
MS: I've not played every other Dreamcast shooter, so this is rather hard to answer. Our emphasis certainly was on big, nice explosion effects. We also use a very complex and sophisticated particle and animation system. There are also levels where it is possible to do heavy destruction to the environment.

RG: It looks wonderful. How long has the team been working on the graphics engine?
JG: We have been working for about four to five years on *Sturmwind*. This includes all parts of the game: graphics, design, engine, etc. Two people have been



» [Dreamcast] Like *Border Down*, *Sturmwind* features both horizontal and vertical levels.


» [Dreamcast] Some of the bosses look absolutely spectacular, with this puffer fish being a real standout in the footage we've seen.

working on the game, and we've recently hired two artists that are working on various parts of the game's soundtrack.

RG: Why do you think the shmup genre remains so popular?
JG: Because it's nice and simple. Just grab the joypad and play a level, or just play for a couple of minutes. Most of the new games are very time-consuming and very large, with a mission sometimes taking an hour or more to play.

RG: Why does Redspotgames still support the Dreamcast?
MS: Five friends who all shared the same passion for Sega's Dreamcast founded Redspotgames. We felt that Sega's last console had been discontinued too early and that a lot of the machine's potential had been lost due to that fact. Since our first Dreamcast game, *Last Hope*, a Neo Geo AES port from 2007, we have released *Wind & Water: Puzzle Battles* and *Rush Rally Racing*, and still have *Sturmwind* to come. From an entrepreneurial point of view, we release games on this platform because there remains a very loyal fan base for it – and don't forget the die-hard collectors. Then there's the fact that these are exactly the type of games we like playing as gamers – and we do!

RG: Could we expect *Sturmwind* as a download in the future?
MS: To be honest, we don't know. *Sturmwind* has been designed and optimised for the Dreamcast so far, uses a lot of resources of this system already, and under such circumstances we cannot meet many of the requirements of download services such as PSN, XBLA or WiiWare without any problems or re-writing the entire game. There would also be a lot of work concerning alternative music and sound codecs and file types. So far we're only offering the original Dreamcast game; maybe it will even be a Dreamcast exclusive forever, but who knows?

RG: Finally, when will *Sturmwind* be released?
MS: Q2 2011. A more specific date will be announced later, and it will cost 34.95 euros. ✱

For more information about *Sturmwind*, visit **sturmwind.duranik.com**.



An interview with Timm Hellwig

The CEO of NG:DEV.TEAM on the studio's Dreamcast shmup, Fast Striker



■ **Retro Gamer: Why release *Fast Striker* on the Dreamcast?**
Timm Hellwig: Because we can and there is a strong fellowship of Dreamcast fans that purchase our games. As long as we get strong support from them, we try to publish our Neo Geo games for the Dreamcast too.

■ **RG: What does *Fast Striker* offer over existing DC shooters?**
TH: It's the first and only [bullet hell] on the DC that can offer a Cave-like experience, especially in Maniac and Omake mode. Novice and Original mode were made for casual shooting fans.

■ **RG: What differences exist between the Dreamcast and Neo Geo versions?**
TH: Some small graphical changes were needed to fit this game into the small memory of the DC. While the DC only has 16 megabytes, the Neo Geo can address 128 megabytes. The gameplay experience should be identical.

The DC version has better sound effects and CD music.

■ **RG: Why does the shoot-'em-up genre remain so popular with gamers?**
TH: I personally would not consider it popular. But it's an accessible genre and it still offers the awesome arcade feel that most genres today miss.

■ **RG: How does this compare to your first shooter, *Last Hope*?**
TH: *Fast Striker* is way more advanced. It's the biggest megabit cartridge in the history of the Neo Geo: it has 1,520 megabits and it is the first Neo Geo game with a full digitised stereo soundtrack with a length over 25 minutes. It also has six times more bullets on screen without slowdown than every other Neo Geo game before. The game was playtested by professional Japanese arcade gamers and is up to the Japanese arcade gameplay standards.

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Are you interested in buying Sturmwind?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

TheNewMonkey
I'll wait for reviews. I'm interested in it but the Dreamcast has enough shooters. I would prefer something of another genre.

Mootown
Yes, it looks incredible. Everyone talking about how the DC has too many shmups: it doesn't. And certainly not enough horizontal ones.

felgekarp
I ordered myself a copy the other day.

CIH
Already ordered here.

DreamcastRIP
I'm waiting for some reviews first. Looks to be one of the best Atari Jaguar, sorry, Dreamcast games for quite some time.

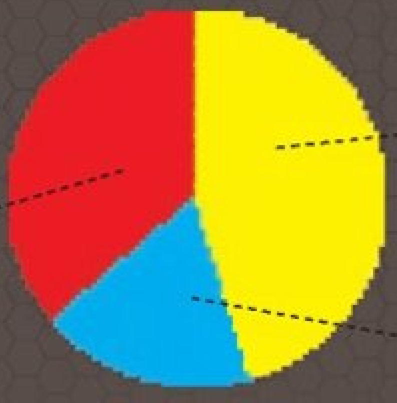
Cauterize
I've ordered it already, just like I did with *Beggar Prince*, *Pier Solar*, *Zaku* and the rest. The days of being able to walk into a shop and buy or pre-order a brand new game for these consoles is long gone, so the excitement of a new title itself is enough to warrant a sale in my opinion.

James A
Still a nice feeling to see DC stuff still coming out. It may be another shooter but hey, it's a new DC game so it's all good. Be nice if someone did another survival horror for the DC.

Darran
Must admit, I'm really looking forward to this. Yes, it's another Dreamcast shooter, but let's face it: developers who do release games for it know that there is an interested audience for it. Other genres would certainly be nice, but I'm personally quite happy, as I obviously love shooters.

thevulture
Looks gorgeous. My kind of game, but I just haven't got the spare cash to buy games like I used to. Damn you, 2011. Looking at this on YouTube, though, just makes it even clearer that the DC died far too soon.

FORUM OPINION
Are you interested in *Sturmwind*?



retro columns

>> RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio…
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Living without Wi-Fi

I've just moved house. I say 'just' – it really happened three days before Christmas, which seems like a lifetime ago now. Actually, it doesn't. While you're reading this some time in the future that is 2011, I'm writing this on 27 December 2010. Apologies for pulling back the curtain and showing you how this stuff works, but I do like to try to be vaguely honest here.

Anyway, my new house is brilliant. It's got a toilet that only leaks a bit and one of the rooms has heating, although that only comes on at random times in the night. One negative is that it has really crappy internet. I mean like really crappy. It's at times like this that I look back fondly on the speedy days of 56k dial-up. Sometimes it works. More often than not it doesn't. It drops out as regularly as a hippy student on acid in California in 1967.

As a result of this, I have to do all my emails, writing and pornography collation on my telephone. In a cafe. That has Wi-Fi. I feel neutered. Or castrated. Maybe they're the same thing? If I had a good internet connection or a dictionary, I'd look them up. I have neither. So instead, I'll look a bit like a bell-end who isn't as clever as he pretends to be.

By typing this on a phone, I'm reminded of those awful office word processor type programs that were available in the Eighties for home computers. They were made available on nearly all home systems. I remember one being shown for the BBC on *Micro Live*.

Even at that young age, they looked piss poor. Bear in mind that I used to get a boner at even the dullest computer program. You're looking at someone who went out and bought Speech for the BBC – a 'game' that sort of made your computer speak and… well, that was it. I remember it being more expensive than other tapes available at the time and spent a whole 30 minutes getting it to say swears before realising that I would never use this ever again.

But word processing programs and officey type things looked awful, even in the old days. I just couldn't imagine how they could do anything but make life in a functioning office harder. Daisy wheel printers were s**t, and by the time you'd typed all your accounts into those complicated boxes, your company would have gone bust.

Did anyone ever actually use these things? I'm genuinely interested. If you did, could you drop me a line and tell me if they were any use? I say 'drop me a line' – I'm not giving you my address or anything, but maybe leave a comment on the forum for me.

It's amazing that my phone can do anything a home computer could do 25 years ago. Except play *Chuckie Egg*. The Spectrum emulator on my iPhone is okay, but it has pony controls. Sort that out and I'll be happy.



My connection drops out as regularly as a hippy student on acid in California in 1967



GETTING PALLY

THE LOWDOWN ON THE NEW PAL COLLECTOR'S WEBSITE, RETROCOLLECT

Inspired by websites like Digital Press and AtariAge, Retro Gamer forumites Jan Baart and Adam Buchanan (better known to many of you as Hydrox and Cauterize respectively), noticed a website-sized gap in the internet for those collectors wishing to find out more about the rarity and releases of PAL games, and recently they plugged it.

Launched in December, RetroCollect (**www.retrocollect.com**) offers a growing list of PAL rarity guides and release lists across a range of game platforms, and allows users to list, track and compare their collections with others. We caught up with RetroCollect's co-creator Adam Buchanan to tell us more about the website and to find out what changes we can expect to see in the coming months.

■ RG: Why did you set RetroCollect up?

Adam Buchanan: While the US have their wealth of collecting guides and communities, Europe and Australia were always left in the cold. After years of complaining that there wasn't a sufficient resource for retro gamers and collectors in these regions, we decided to take action.

■ RG: So what does it offer over similar sites?

AB: RetroCollect stands out from the crowd as it offers the only multi-platform PAL rarity guides and release lists around. Our data has been collected over the years by a small team of dedicated collectors, focusing on quality over quantity, verifying as much data as possible. Our unique approach in this area allows us to cater for both casual gamers and enthusiastic collectors, offering both the basic information and extreme details into individual games such as the many known variants of each title. We always felt that a strong source of information should be supported with an active community of gamers. To make this possible, RetroCollect hosts an active section for retro gamers to create their own profiles and begin tracking their collection, uploading collection photos and discussing anything related with the hobby.

> **"We can preserve the history we love for future generations"**

■ RG: How important is the preservation of old games?

AB: Without a doubt it's the most important part of retro gaming today. We have the opportunity to preserve the very history we love for future generations. As every year goes by the packaging games are released in becomes a year older, along with the worry that nobody can predict how long these games will remain in working order. While we still have the chance, we encourage gamers worldwide to scan their games' artwork and archive whatever they can as we begin to preserve these games for generations to come. RetroCollect will continue to contribute to this effort on a regular basis by preserving as much relevant data and multimedia as possible.

■ RG: Why isn't PAL collecting as widespread as US collecting?

AB: We believe the lack of resources online is a major reason behind this. US collectors have always known what they wanted or needed for their collection, as release lists have been provided to them since day one. Whether they were ticking off a game one by one or searching through eBay alphabetically with a guide at hand, they've had the focus PAL gamers have needed for a long time.

■ RG: Can we expect RetroCollect to change in future months?

AB: As we continue to grow alongside the community, so will our database. Many new systems such as the MB MicroVision and Microsoft Xbox are being added to the database on a regular basis. Our next targets are the PlayStation and PlayStation 2 release lists, along with the aim to start featuring DOS games. *

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Sega unveils new console

Sega recently installed testing units of its new 'Toylets' – basically urinals spliced with interactive mini-games – in four locations in Tokyo. As the cherub above ably demonstrates, these machines ask players to compete in a series of challenges using their urine. One, called 'The Northern Wind, Sun And Me' sees men trying to blow girls' skirts via the force of their fluids. The harder you pee, the higher the skirts lift. Naturally.



» Miner Willy and Monty Mole surface on iPhone

Elite Systems has again added to its iPhone Spectrum emulator with four new volumes, each containing six games and priced at 59p. **Retro Gamer**'s own Martyn Carroll and David Crookes assisted Elite with these recent collections, which feature the best of Speccy gaming, including *Jack The Nipper, Monty Mole* and, of course, *Manic Miner.*



» Life's a drag

Nothing ever lasts forever, sang Ian McCulloch, possibly referring to the recent toppling of long-standing high scores on *Asteroids* and *GORF.* So take a moment to salute Todd Rogers' world record on Activision's *Dragster* for the Atari VCS. His time of 5.51 seconds is all down to "perfect shifting, perfect throttle and engaging the clutch on the countdown," he tells us. Here he is with proof of his aceness.

retro columns

PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of CVG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

It's all gone a bit 3D



Illustration by **Lee Piper**

Of the many things that changed with the arrival of 3D, the thing I still can't get over is how it turned everyone I respected into a load of liars.

You think I'm overreacting? 2D was always honest. Everybody knew it was basic, even as far back as *Space Invaders*. It was all right. It was early days. Restrictions of the hardware were acknowledged. If somebody caught you by surprise with more than the accepted number of sprites on screen, it was cause for celebration. Never mind the slowdown.

As soon as Sony showed that PlayStation T-rex, it was the beginning of the end for honest folk. When Nintendo countered the PlayStation hype with Project Reality, the only person I knew who didn't fall for it was Radion Automatic, who swiftly dubbed the whole thing 'Project Fib'. I couldn't help myself, though. I wanted to believe that there would be no pop-up and infinite draw distance, and special effects just like *Terminator* 2.

Sega lied too. Or, to be fair, it was usually the Sega fans, desperate for the Saturn to stand its ground. We all had to get very excited about *Virtua Fighter 2* running at 60 frames per second, while *Tekken 2* plainly looked so much better. We started looking at obscure reasons for enjoying games other than the games themselves. This was different to accepting the loss of animation frames from *Street Fighter*, because that was the whole 2D food chain that started with the arcades and filtered down onto consoles. We knew our place. Nobody lied. Or not as much.

If you could ignore all the lies, the games did become very good, and quickly. We soon accepted *WipEout* and were genuinely wowed by *Panzer Dragoon*. Nintendo's *Mario 64* and *Pilotwings* were just superb, like nothing we'd seen or felt before; the genuine surprise at grabbing Bowser by his tail or hang-gliding over waterfalls.

What's troubled me most about the lies is how badly I used to fall for them. Sony has been the most outstanding: that *Final Fantasy* sequence that heralded the PlayStation 2; the entire E3 2005 PlayStation 3 showcase. *Killzone* still doesn't look that good. But, again, in the end, the PS3 has awesome games too. It just doesn't look like *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*.

By the way, I am totally at peace with 3D now. The PS3 and Xbox 360 have been around a good while, so there's absolutely no point in lying. Not about the visuals anyway. Guys like Bungie and Naughty Dog are getting on with the games, keeping us entertained.

Kinect and PlayStation Move, on the other hand…

As soon as Sony showed that T-rex, it was the beginning of the end for honest folk

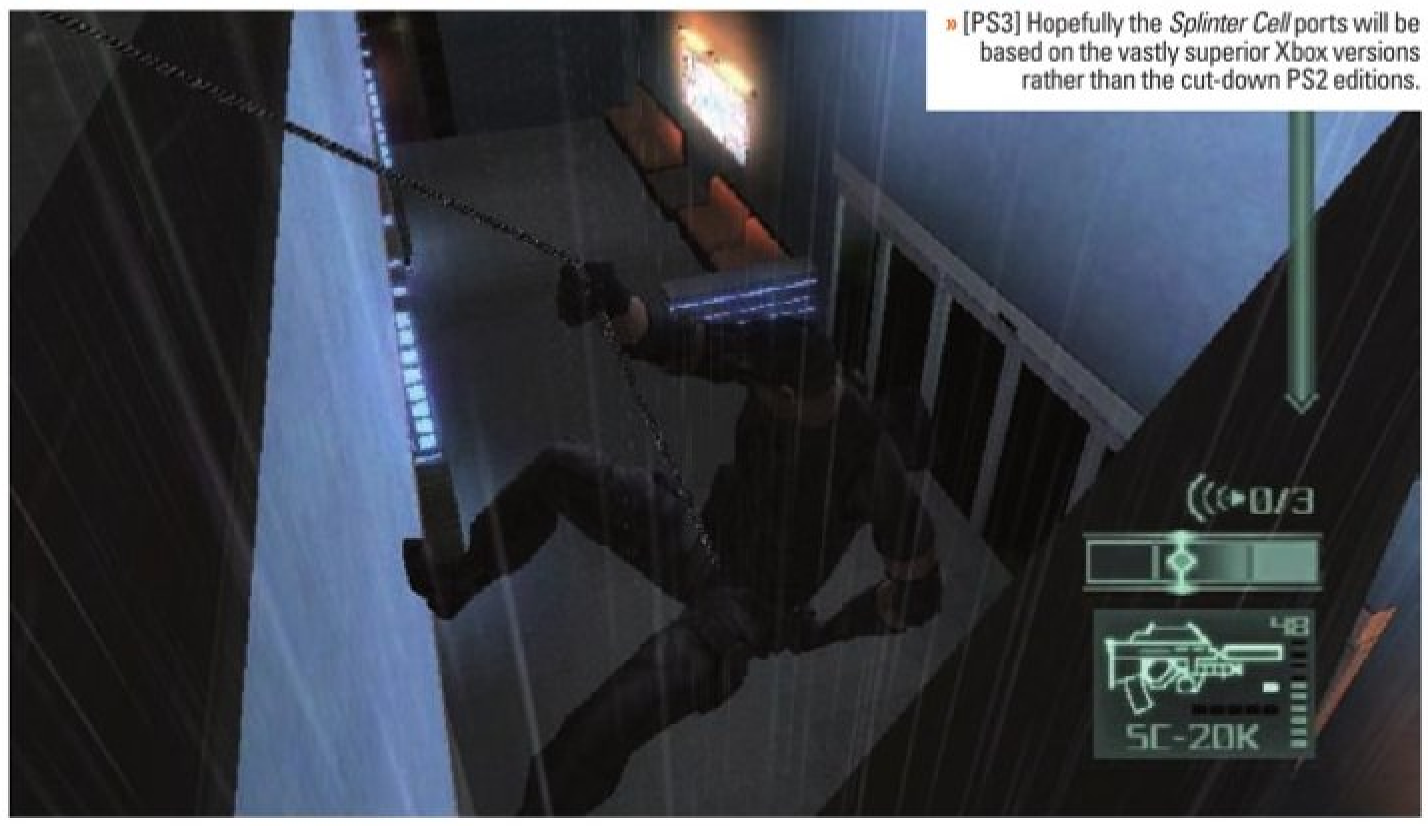
MORE HD COLLECTIONS INCOMING

SPLINTER CELL AND TOMB RAIDER TRILOGY HD COLLECTIONS ANNOUNCED FOR PS3

The trend in PS3 gaming at the moment sees many publishers sifting through their back catalogue and selecting popular last-gen games to give HD makeovers. Sony's excellent *God Of War Collection* kicked things off with assurance, and was shortly followed up with *The Sly Collection* and Ubisoft's *Prince Of Persia Trilogy*. Well, prepare to add two more franchises to that burgeoning list.

In the wake of last month's news that *Tomb Raider* is getting re-rebooted, Square Enix announced that an HD collection of three Crystal Dynamics *Tomb Raider* titles will be heading exclusively to the PS3. Scheduled for released on 25 March, *Tomb Raider Trilogy* will feature HD remasters of *Tomb Raider: Legend* and *Tomb Raider Anniversary*, as well as the complete – and already in HD – *Tomb Raider: Underworld*. The pack will also contain a smattering of exclusive bonus extras too, including making-of movies for all three games.





» [PS3] Hopefully the *Splinter Cell* ports will be based on the vastly superior Xbox versions rather than the cut-down PS2 editions.

In other related news, Ubisoft recently announced that it is to be following up *Prince Of Persia Trilogy* with *Splinter Cell Trilogy*. Scheduled for release later this year and rumoured to feature the original *Splinter Cell*, *Pandora Tomorrow* and *Chaos Theory*, there's no word yet on whether or not the games will feature stereoscopic 3D support as *Prince Of Persia Trilogy* did, although how many people do you know who actually own a 3D television? Between us, we know just one person, and he was forced to sell his PlayStation 3 to pay for it.

Sadly, it seems Xbox owners are once again left out in the cold as far as these HD remakes are concerned, as neither collection has been announced for the console, which is a little bit strange considering the Xbox origin of Sam Fisher. It would be interesting, though, to see which version of *Splinter Cell* Ubisoft opts to tart up: the PS2 one or the superior Xbox version? *

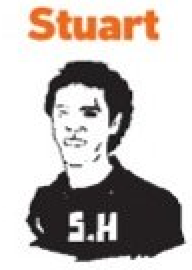
* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



It's great to see last-generation games being given a fresh lick of paint. If I could choose from any old trilogy to get re-imagined in HD, I'd happily opt for *Silent Hill*.

Stuart



While extremely unlikely to happen, given the renaissance of the beat-'em-up genre I'd probably most like to see some kind of *Tekken* collection, with the first three receiving an HD lick of paint and an online versus mode. I just think the last two games especially hold up pretty well today. Well, I still play them occasionally anyway.

Martyn



I'd love to see the first three *Jak & Daxter* games given the update treatment. The open-world vistas of the second and third games would look absolutely stunning in HD, and they could throw in the *Jak X* racing game spin-off as an added bonus.



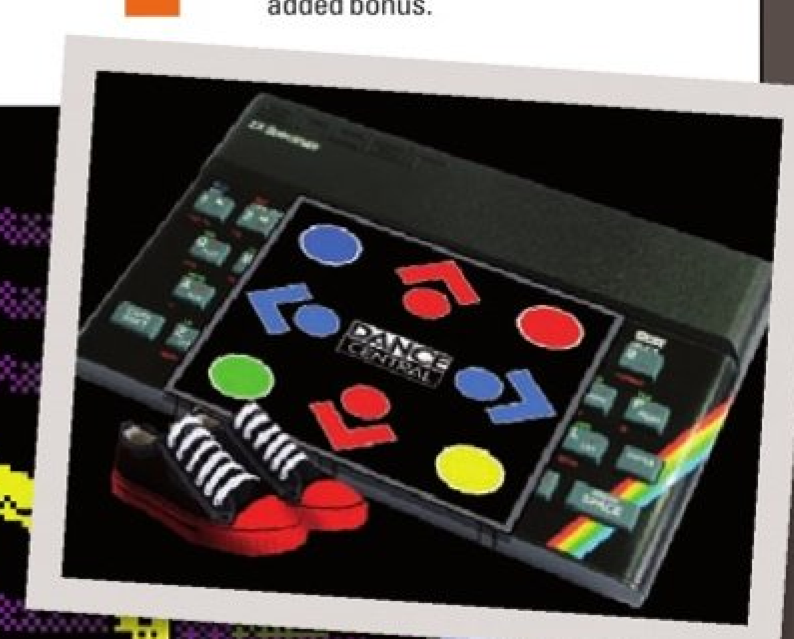
WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 16

Dance Central

IF YOU'VE YET to see Darran doing an impression of a dancing cat to the sound of *Poison*, you should drop this magazine immediately to check out his channel on YouTube. We've asked our resident Spectrum filter, Trevor, to imagine how *Dance Central* would look ported to the ZX Spectrum, and to also help us wrap our heads around the control mechanics. Ladies and gentlemen, we give you ZX finger trainers – with rubber soles, natch.





» Sadly, 5.1 CD-quality sound might be a step too far for the Spectrum.

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Arcade Ultimate Portable Mega Drive

- **RRP:** £39.99
- **Buy it from:** BlazeEurope.com

The treasure this month is the latest portable Mega Drive unit from Blaze. A vast improvement over previous models, while the sound remains as tinny as ever – headphones do improve things a fraction – Blaze can be applauded for finally addressing the issue of the screen, which is crisper and notably larger too.

With the picture quality improved but the sound quality as bad as ever, that just leaves the question of the games. While this pack features the same careworn Sega titles, what makes this latest revision special is the fact that it is now compatible with SD cards, allowing you to download and play as many Mega Drive ROMs as you can fit on one (providing of course that you own the original games).

Awarding it extra Brownie points is the fact that you don't need to keep feeding it batteries either, as you can replenish its energy by simply hooking it up to your computer via the included USB lead. It's a big improvement over previous iterations, and Blaze has clearly aimed to leave no stone unturned in its ongoing pursuit of faux-Mega Drive perfection.

Our only gripe is that considering you'll have to fork out for an SD card as well as a lead if you wish to play games on your telly, there are some who will consider £39.99 for the unit a bit on the steep side. However, compared to **previous models, this is undeniably a move in the right direction.**





Crest Of The Wolf

- **RRP:** £18
- **Buy it from:** ConsolePassion.co.uk

Surprisingly when you consider the popularity of the genre, there were few side-scrolling beat-'em-ups released for the PC Engine. In fact, the reason why has remained a mystery that has baffled the most brilliant of minds for many console generations. *Crest Of The Wolf* is basically a *Final Fight*-a-like from Hudson Soft, and not a particularly great one at that – but, as we said, there's not a great deal of choice on the machine, so you take what you can get. The cover certainly makes the game look awesome, though: kind of looks like the child of *Castlevania* and *Double Dragon*. It's not.



James Bond T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £19
- **Buy it from:** Nerdoh.co.uk

While we do like its shirts, Nerdoh seems to be the supplier for movie buffs wishing to wear T-shirts that promote their favourite films as inconspicuously as possible. Take this *James Bond* shirt, which features a distressed print of Universal Imports – the underground import car dealership that acts as a cover for Mr Bond's spy operations. Only the hardcore will likely make the connection. Saying that, you couldn't very well wear a T-shirt saying, 'When I'm not out and about I work in the basement of MI6', could you?



Screenshots May Vary

- **RRP:** £7.99 (Quick Guide)
  £13.99 (The Best Of edition)
- **Buy it from:** Lulu.com

Screenshots May Vary is a simple concept that reminds us of the 'Clash Of The Titans' feature that **games™**'s retro section used to run many moons ago. It's basically a reference book of screenshots that compares the graphics between games released on the Amstrad CPC, C64 and ZX Spectrum. And that's it. It doesn't critique them; it's all visual, and simply allows you to make your own appraisal. If we have one niggle it's that we would have preferred the images to have been a fraction bigger – 24 are squeezed onto a page – but, regardless, this is still a neat idea from the guys at Park Productions.



Scott Pilgrim Figure

■ **RRP:** £12.99
■ **Buy it from:** ForbiddenPlanet.com

Featuring a wealth of nods and sly winks to classic games, if you've yet to see *Scott Pilgrim vs The World* you're missing out on one of the best big-budget cinematic love letters to our beloved pastime since… well, ever. These figurines, which are based on the original 2D *Scott Pilgrim* and not the fleshy 3D Michael Cera version, are ready for action in two respects: melting the faces of groupies with bass guitar riffs and killing evil exes with a sword.



Street Fighter T-Shirt

■ **RRP:** $24 (approx £15)
■ **Buy it from:** Meatbun.us

Fans of the *Street Fighter* series that also have a particular hatred of the series' triangle-haired soldier, Guile, will be pleased to learn that the chaps over at Meat Bun have a specially commissioned T-shirt for Capcom that caters specifically for you. At first glance, it appears to just show a still of the shock animation used whenever a character upsets Blanka. Closer inspection of the head, however, reveals the unmistakable do and dog tags of Guile. Why have Meat Bun singled out Guile? Who knows? Could it simply be that both are based in the US?

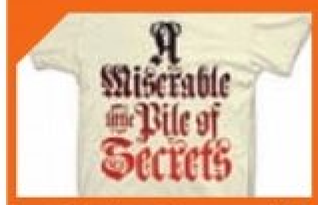


Power-Up Mug

■ **RRP:** $8.99 (approx £5.60)
■ **Buy it from:** ThinkGeek.com

The many games that make up the *Mega Man* series are renowned for offering a gaming challenge that will have you spitting feathers. Thankfully we don't live in the punishing world of *Mega Man*, but, as long as you have these cool mugs inspired by the 'E' energy power-ups from the game, you can almost imagine that you do. And without all of the omnipresent danger, hostility, threat, menace and risk of death that seems to come with it.

TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



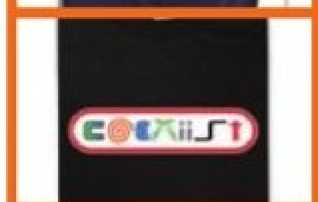
01 A Miserable Little Pile Of Secrets T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Buy it from:** meatbun.us/store/



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Sonic Power-ups
■ **RRP:** $14.95 (approx £10)
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

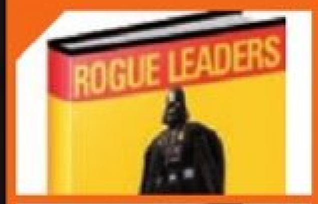


04 Coexist T-shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Mega Drive Card Holder
■ **RRP:** $34.10 (approx £21)
■ **Manufacturer:** Banpresto
■ **Buy it from:** www.strapya-world.com



02 Grow Your Own Moai Statue (aka DOH)
■ **RRP:** $5.99 (£4)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



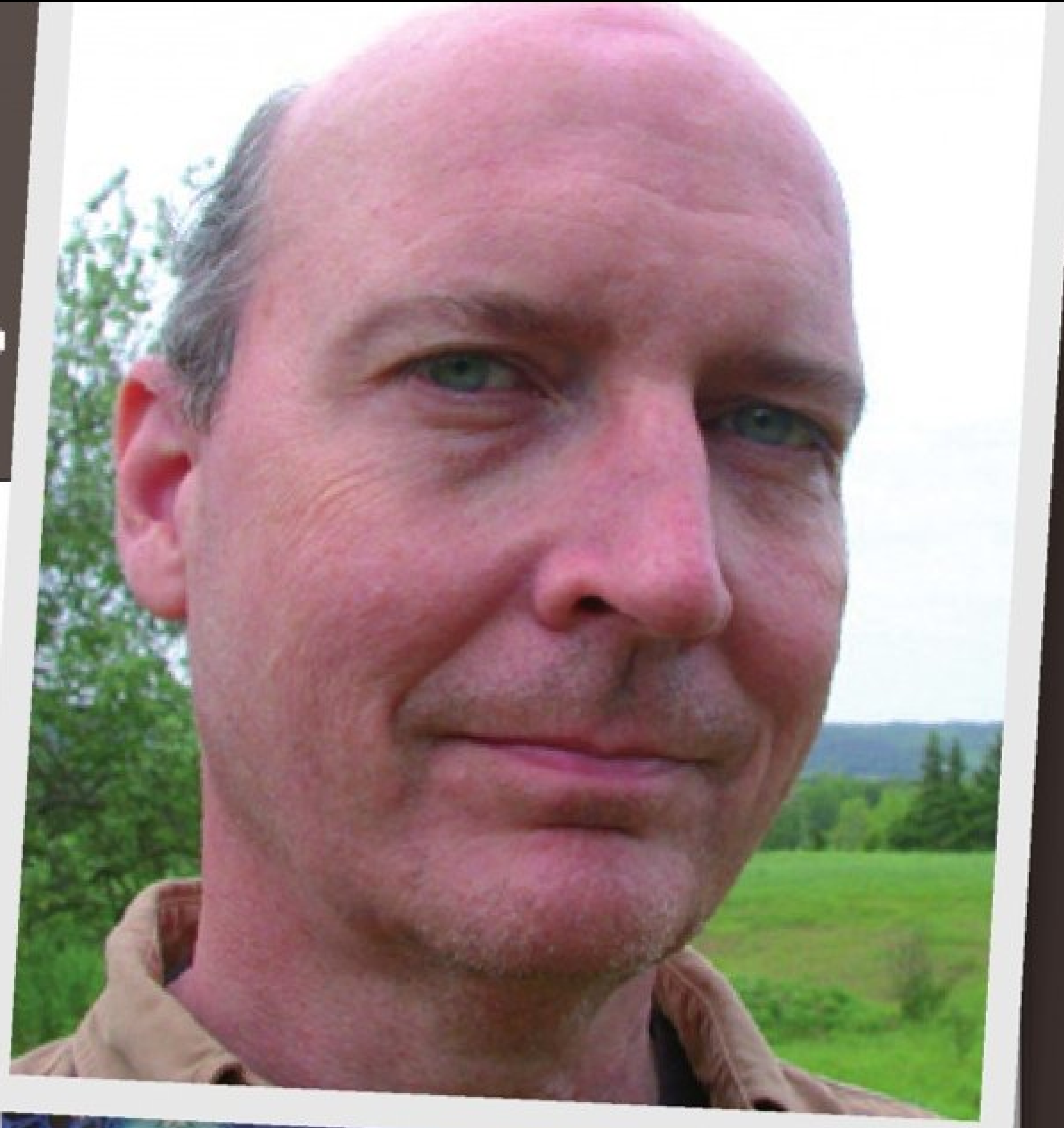
03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
■ **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com



* A MOMENT WITH... Tim Skelly

Every issue we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, Paul Drury chinwags with vector game pioneer Tim Skelly

Who is Tim Skelly?

Tim Skelly produced many early vector games for Cinematronics, including the beautiful *Warrior* (1979) and *Rip-Off* (1980), which championed the idea of co-op play. He went on to join Gottlieb, co-founded Incredible Technologies and also worked on *Sonic 2*.

Which of your games would you recommend to our readers?
Rip-Off, of course. Even though it had to adhere to the norms of shooting games at the time, I left a lot of opportunities for the players to create their own strategies, up to and including just goofing around.

What's your proudest achievement in gaming?
Being one of the first game designers to enable co-operative play. I wasn't the first, but I came close enough to count.

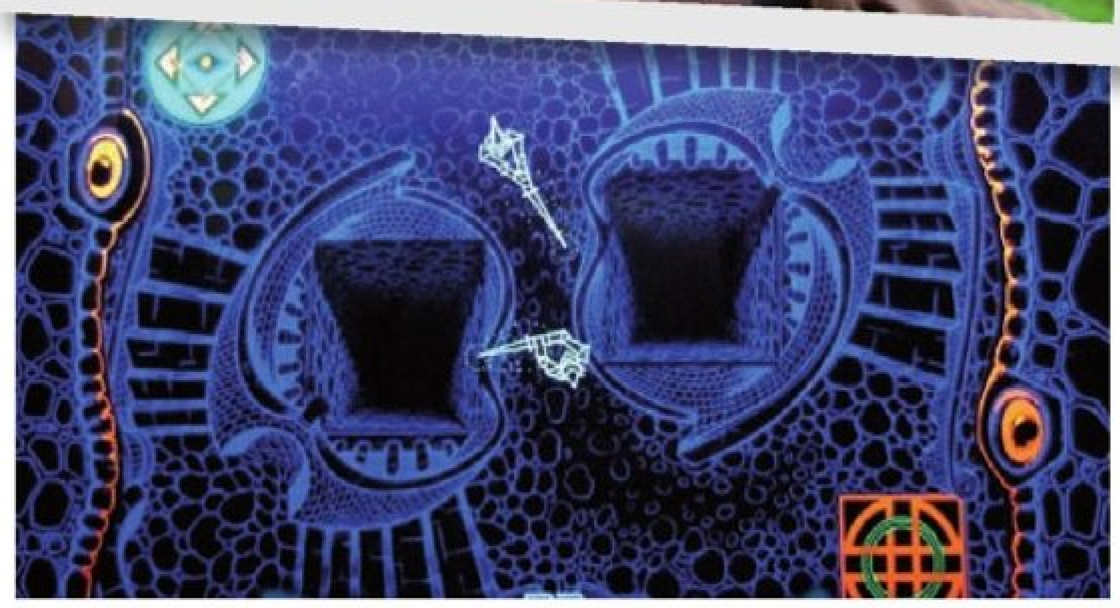
And your biggest disappointment?
My very last game. Not because it was disappointing, but because it was never manufactured. It was called *Screw Loose*. The game was great fun and it let me demonstrate my skills as a cartoonist. Unfortunately, it was made at the time of the big game crash. On the upside, a good friend made it his hobby to re-create the game, so there is still one in existence.

Which other industry veteran do you most admire and why?
Wow, there are so many great game vets out there. I would have to single out sound designer and musician David Thiel. He and I met when we were working on *Reactor*. I'll always admire his ability to turn a limited sound palette into highly effective art.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
I would love to see some turned into full-blown contemporary games. To answer your question, I'd like my games to be remembered as fun, imaginative and artful.

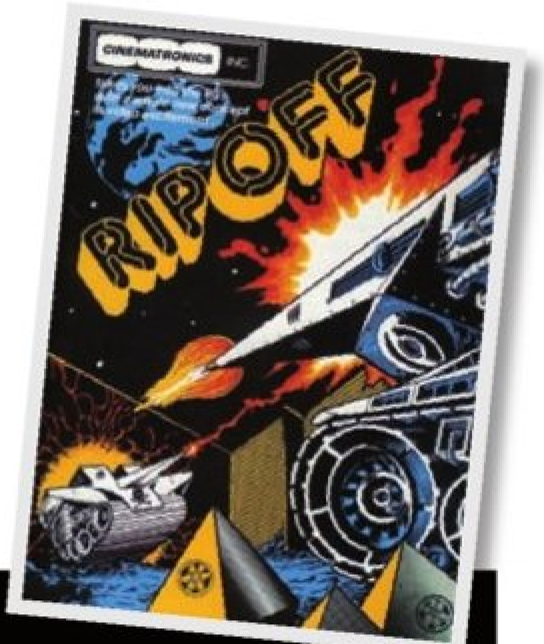
What game do you wish you had made and why?
Plants vs Zombies, hands down. It has multiple forms of gameplay and terrific cartoon graphics, all integrated beautifully.

What opportunities has making games given you?
I realised early on that there was much more to videogames than was first thought. I felt that videogames deserved to be recognised as fine examples of user interface design. As a result, I began attending user interface conferences and I hung out with some great people. Eventually this led to presenting talks at user interface conferences, which led to joining the Microsoft User Interface Group. Ultimately, I was part of a fact-finding mission to Japan for the US Government.



» [Arcade] The luminous beauty of *Warrior*, the great grandfather of *Soul Calibur* in all its glory.

» A flyer for *Rip-Off*, Tim's tip for those new to his back catalogue.



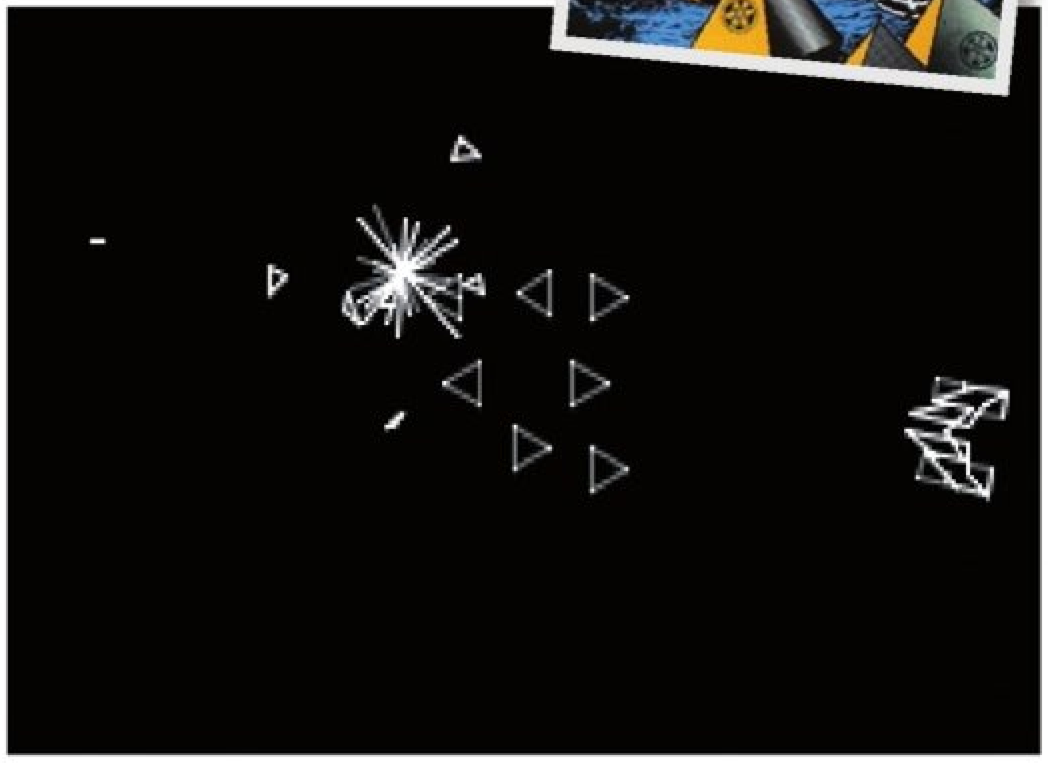
What's your best memory of being in the games industry?
That would be travel. Of course, the excitement of designing a hit game cannot be beat, but honestly, getting paid to travel to foreign trade shows was quite a thrill. On a smaller scale, I always reference the night I turned on all the *Sundance* games on the production line. It was almost like having an army of robots. How cool is that?

Can you share an interesting anecdote from your time in the industry?
This has little to do with the game business, but it took place during a business trip to England. After the trade show finished, three of us rented a car and drove out to the countryside, which, of course, included a trip to Stonehenge. By chance, I came across a reference to another henge, Woodhenge. We drove for a few hours to find this unlikely place and finally, we were turned away from an army base where we were told, with much laughter, that there was no such place. As we know today, Woodhenge was real and it is now part of an archaeological dig not too far from Stonehenge. I have another fun recollection from that trip, but it involves hallucinogenic drugs and the past should remain in the past.

Can videogames be art?
Does a moose poop in the woods? (I'm a permanent resident of Canada now.) *



» Tim relaxes atop *Reactor*, the first arcade game to feature the author's name on the title screen.



04 February – 03 March

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



4 February 1980
■ Clive Sinclair launches his new computer, the ZX80. That'll be £79.95 and one soldering iron please…



6 February 1968
■ Akira Yamaoka, the composer of the eerily captivating soundtracks to Konami's *Silent Hill* games, is born.



6 February 1984
■ Ocean releases *Mr Wimpy*, a *Burger Time*-style game licensed by the burger chain. Go large?



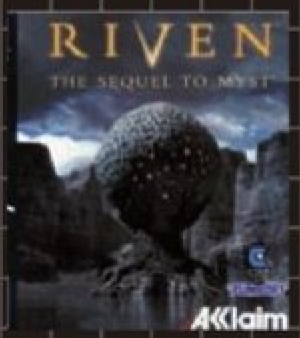
6 February 2009
■ Square's classic RPG game *Chrono Trigger* finally gets an official European release, albeit on the Nintendo DS.



6 February 2009
■ *Pikmin* makes the jump from GameCube to Wii and doesn't lose too much of its quirkiness in the process.



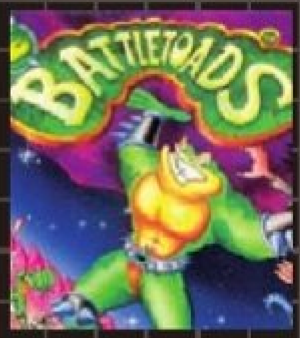
14 February 1991
■ Psygnosis lets its little green-haired *Lemmings* out into the world for the first time. Amiga owners get the first look.



16 February 1998
■ *Riven*, the eagerly awaited follow-up to *Myst*, goes on sale in Europe on the PlayStation.



17 February 2003
■ *Jak II*, the sequel to *Jak & Daxter*, is released on the PlayStation 2 and plays very well indeed.



18 February 1993
■ *Battletoads* infests your NES thanks to Rare and the Stamper brothers.



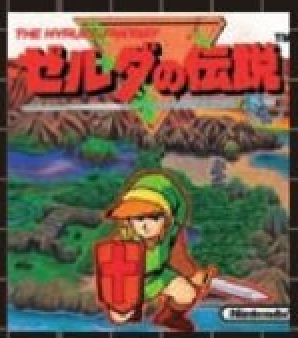
18 February 2011
■ Prepare for epic battles, as *Marvel Vs Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds* is finally going to be on sale.



20 February 1987
■ Konami's run-and-gun classic *Contra* (that's *Gryzor* in Euro money) is released into arcades for the first time.



21 February 1986
■ The Famicom Disk System is launched in Japan, along with a handful of launch titles.



21 February 1986
■ The first game in the hugely popular *Zelda* franchise, *The Legend Of Zelda*, is released in Japan on the Famicom Disk System.



24 February 1994
■ *Sonic 3* is released on the Mega Drive, with gamers getting their first look at *Knuckles The Echidna*.



25 February 2000
■ Novalogic's *Delta Force 2* first-person shooter is released on PC in the UK.



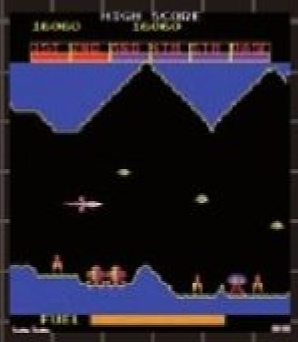
26 February 2011
■ Debuting in Japan and arriving in Europe and America the following month, the Nintendo 3DS.



27 February 1996
■ *Pokémon Red, Green* and *Blue* are released in Japan on the Game Boy. Worldwide *Pokémon* madness soon follows.



27 February 2009
■ *Halo Wars* for the Xbox 360 goes on sale in the UK.



2 March 1981
■ Konami releases *Scramble*, its newest coin-op game, in the arcades. Japan gets it first with the US/UK following within days.



03 March 2011
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

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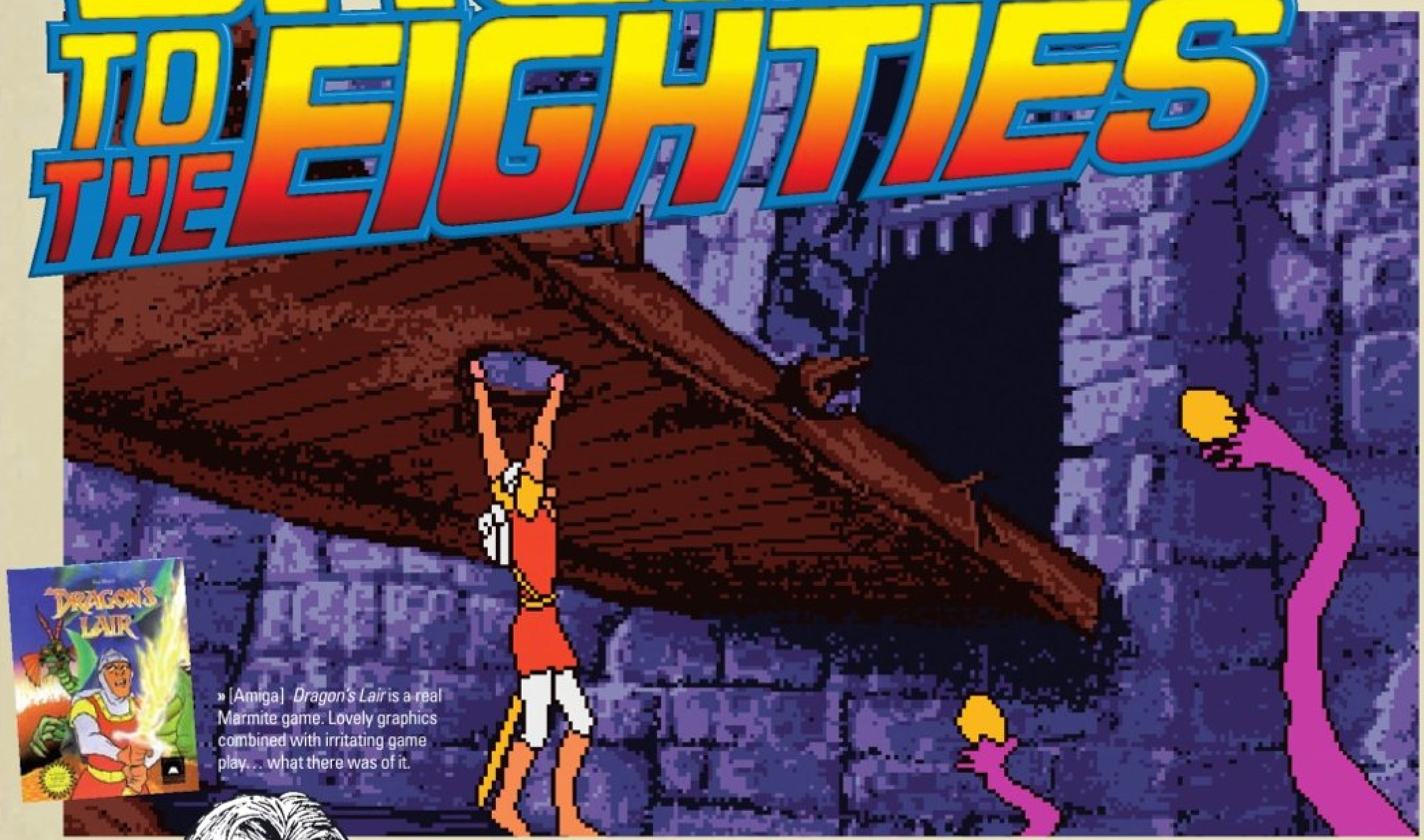


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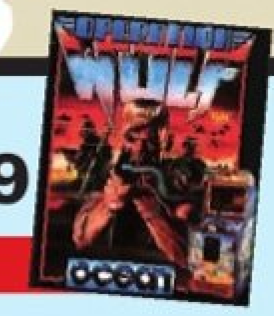
BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [Amiga] *Dragon's Lair* is a real Marmite game. Lovely graphics combined with irritating game play… what there was of it.

CHARTS

MARCH 1989

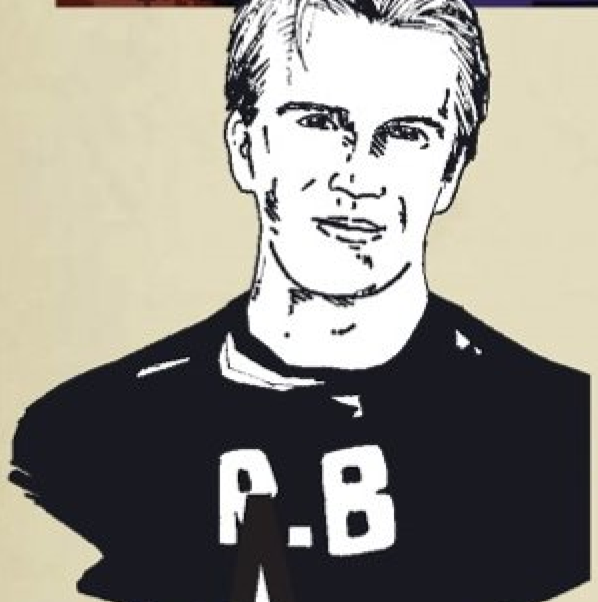


AMSTRAD

1	Operation Wolf (Ocean)
2	Thunder Blade (US Gold)
3	Last Ninja 2 (System 3)
4	Giants (US Gold)
5	Bomb Jack (Encore)

» [Arcade] *Hard Drivin'* brought an element of realism to arcade driving. You even had an ignition key to start the game.





THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1989

MARCH 1989 – Telecomsoft calls time, Codemasters Ate My Pocket Money, No US Gold at the end of Rainbow Arts, Dungeon Master returns, Hard Drivin' arrives while Chase HQ follows in pursuit. Richard Burton follows the skid marks…

The big company news this month was that British Telecom was looking to sell its software arm, Telecomsoft, with its associated labels; Firebird, Rainbird and Silverbird.

There were already rumblings that a buyer was interested, but Telecomsoft wouldn't divulge the potential suitor until a deal had been agreed. However, staffing movements over the previous few months hinted that it could be MicroProse. Two months later the sale was signed and it was indeed MicroProse. They swiftly made plans for Firebird and Rainbird but Silverbird was to be phased out, with MicroProse citing that it didn't have much experience of running a budget label.

Conversely, budget gamesters Codemasters had no qualms about releasing a full price game, and did so with the arrival of one of their most memorable releases, *Rock Star Ate My Hamster*. It was a refreshingly new twist on the management game genre in which you control a music artist, get them to practise, gig, buy equipment and attempt to make hit records while keeping an eye on the bottom line.

In what could've been a dour affair, Codemasters saturated the game with sarcastic humour and bizarreness (the in-game Top 10 charts featured such bands as The Festering Mulberries and The Rent Shop Boys). This was also borne out in the press with several memorable 'Could You Manage?' spot adverts featuring 'stars' such as Wacky Jacko, Tina Turnoff, Michael Gorge and Stiff Pilchard. Although *Rock Star* rated only averagely amongst the reviews sections of the time, the game grew into something of a cult favourite.

US Gold ended its partnership with Rainbow Arts after just a year, stating it was looking into more lucrative partnerships. Maybe that was a polite way of stepping away from Rainbow Arts which, undeniably talented in its coding, had an unhealthy attraction to legal wrangling with previous projects such as *The Great Giana Sisters* and the *R-Type* clone, *Katakis*.

Dragon's Lair had always been a game to deceive, and it would once again with Readysoft's release of the Amiga version; sadly, it was the same old story of looking fantastic but yielding very little in terms of gameplay. Amiga gamers also had the added annoyance of multiple disk swapping should they have not owned a hard drive.

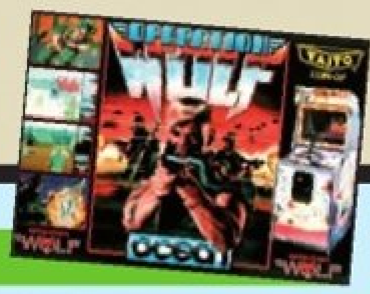
Another dungeon that required exploring was FTL's follow-up expansion set to their original best selling action RPG game, *Dungeon Master*. *Chaos Strikes Back* continued on from the original game adding a further five levels of monsters and traps to conquer and avoid, as well as a utility disk to personalise your characters. It was a superb game but also very testing. *Chaos* was initially released on the Atari ST with an Amiga version promised some time in the near future.

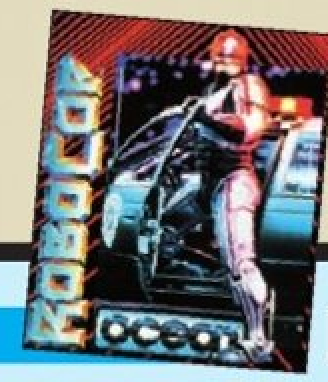


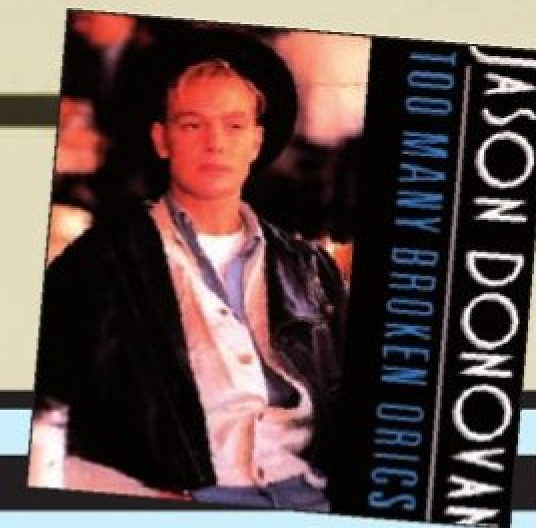
» [PC] If titillation is what you're after you'd be better off with the underwear section of the Next catalogue…



» [Master System] *Rampage* was a pleasant game and fun to play but repetitiveness and a lack of variety surfaced far too soon…







ATARI ST

1	Operation Wolf (Ocean)
2	Thunder Blade (US Gold)
3	Lombard RAC Rally (Mandarin)
4	Elite (Firebird)
5	Battle Chess (Electronic Arts)

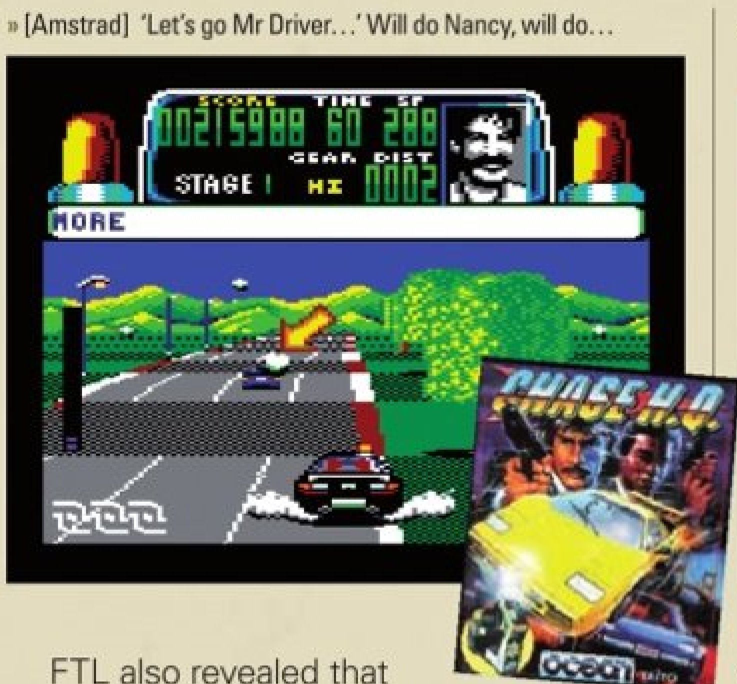
SPECTRUM

1	Robocop (Ocean)
2	Afterburner (Activision)
3	Operation Wolf (Ocean)
4	Thunder Blade (US Gold)
5	Formula Grand Prix (Alternative)

MUSIC

1	Too Many Broken Hearts (Jason Donovan)
2	Like A Prayer (Madonna)
3	This Time I Know It's For Real (Donna Summer)
4	Help! (Bananarama & Lananeeneenoonoo)
5	Straight Up (Paula Abdul)

» [Amstrad] 'Let's go Mr Driver…' Will do Nancy, will do…



FTL also revealed that it had begun developing *Dungeon Master II* for several systems. Apparently it would be set in space with a science-fiction-smothered storyline, with FTL anticipating a release date the end of 1989. It was probably best to take your time and enjoy the challenge of *Chaos Strikes Back*, though; *Dungeon Master II* made a fashionably late appearance by showing up on the Amiga a full six years later with no hint of space, starships or aliens.

Sauciness abounds when Tomahawk announced plans for a game based on *Emmanuelle*. The erotic adventure would see you meandering around Brazil trying to acquire three statuettes, which would ultimately help you track down Emmanuelle and complete the game. Mildly titillating, if you had lived in a cave all your life, *Emmanuelle* proved to be a gaming curio rather than an accomplished graphic adventure. ST, Amiga and PC owners were no doubt hoping for more…

Two projects that were complete and ready for release were *Gemini Wing*, a vertical shoot-'em-up, and *Silkworm*, a horizontal shoot-'em-up. Both were coin-op games by Tecmo, both developed and converted by The Sales Curve and both eventually released by Virgin Mastertronic on Amiga, ST, C64, Spectrum and Amstrad.

While *Gemini Wing* failed to impress beyond the realms of mediocrity, *Silkworm* was a sublime shoot-em-up. The Amiga version was a thing of beauty, and one of the best of its genre on the system.

Just arriving in the arcades of the UK were several terrific new coin-ops. There was the realistic driving feel of Atari's *Hard Drivin'* and the bloody gorefest of zombie-guts-on-face action that was Namco's *Splatterhouse*. Both games made successful transitions to consoles and home micros with Domark fleet of foot in announcing plans for converting *Hard Drivin'* before anyone had the opportunity to turn the ignition key…

» [Spectrum] *Rock Star* was a refreshing new outlook for the management genre with its sarcastically pointed humour.

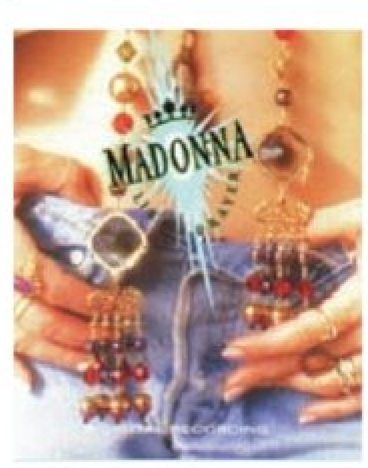


Also arriving was *Ikari III: The Rescue* by SNK, the third in the run-and-gun series, which featured larger characters, more hand-to-hand combat and a different perspective, while wrapping up a terrific month was Taito's *Operation Thunderbolt*, the sequel to their hugely successful shoot/grenade/knife-'em-up *Operation Wolf*.

Ocean Software was once again revelling in obtaining another coin-op license; this time it had acquired and was working on Taito's race and chase driving game *Chase HQ*, with versions available for the usual popular home micros. Once again, the conversions flattered to deceive, with only Spectrum and Amstrad versions receiving any praise and the 16-bit efforts disappointing once more.

Reviewers at multi-format magazine *Computer & Video Games* gave the monthly releases the once over and decided that the best new games were *Blasteroids* (Image Works, Atari ST), *Wec Le Mans* (Ocean, Spectrum), *Battlehawks* (US Gold/Lucasfilm, PC), *Pro Soccer* (CRL, Spectrum), *Purple Saturn Day* (Infogrames, Atari ST), *Andes Attack* (Llamasoft, Atari ST), *Manhunter* (Sierra Online/Activision, Atari ST), *War In Middle Earth* (Melbourne House, Spectrum), *Rampage* (Activision, Master System), *Ys: The Vanished Omens* (Sega, Master System) and *R-Type* (Irem/Sega, Master System).

MARCH 1989 NEWS



» It may have boasted plenty of sugary pop hits, but Madonna's *Like A Prayer* also featured a fair amount of controversy.

24 March saw the oil tanker Exxon Valdez run aground off the coast of Alaska. It ran into Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound, causing a split in the tanker's hull and releasing 11 million gallons of crude oil into the sea in an eight mile slick. The Exxon Valdez had left its usual shipping lane to manoeuvre around small icebergs, having been given permission by the coastguard.

Bad weather conditions spread the slick, resulting in over 1300 miles of Alaskan coastline being contaminated. In comparison, the recent BP disaster in the Gulf Of Mexico released approximately 185 million gallons of oil…

4 March saw a crash involving two commuter trains at Purley in Surrey. Both trains were heading to London on the same track when they were involved in a shunt. The train at the rear hit the leading train, derailed and rolled down an embankment into residential gardens. It left six dead and over 80 injured. The driver was later jailed for manslaughter after admitting passing through a red signal, though this was later overturned.

21 March saw the release of Madonna's fourth album, *Like A Prayer*. The video to the single of the same name premiered on MTV on 3 March and caused controversy for featuring a kiss between Madonna and a black church icon that comes to life. Often mistaken as representing Christ, it was actually Saint Martin de Porres.

THIS MONTH IN…



THE GAMES MACHINE

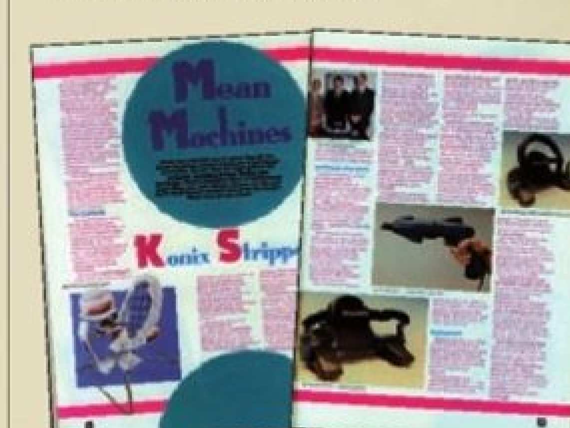
Details of the Konix Multi-System were revealed as its release approached. Games would cost £14.95 and be on 3.5" disk, the system would cost £149, the infamous chair would be £129, and Konix had set a sales target of 100,000 units by Christmas.



COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



More Konix love in *C&VG*, which had a feature it and its peripherals, the yolk, steering wheel and light gun. These add-ons would all introduce 'tactile feedback', adding juddering steering wheels and gun recoil.



ACE



Completing the Konix features this month was *Ace*. The Konix team was considering adding an exercise bike peripheral which would make fitness more fun. Sounds like Konix weren't very far from introducing the world to the equivalent of Wii Fitness 18 years before Nintendo did…



BACK TO THE NINETIES



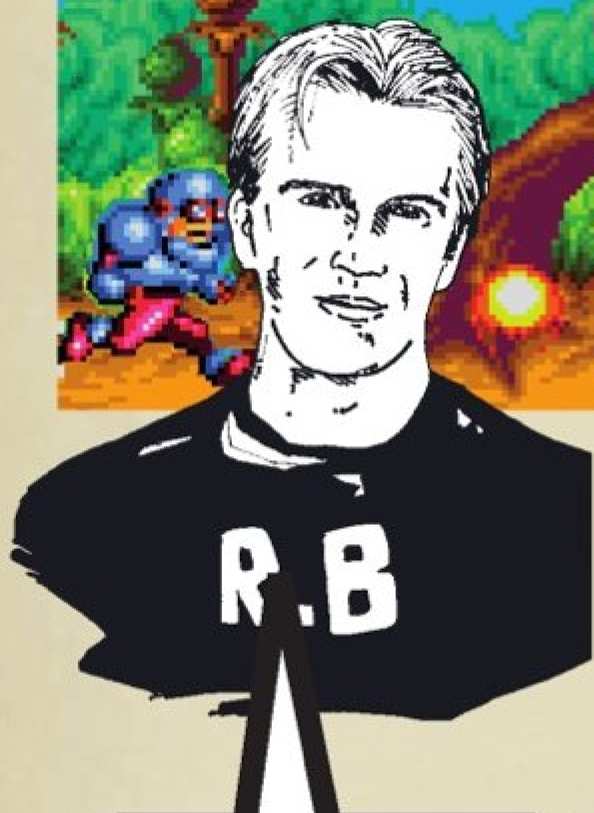
» [Mega Drive] Treasure's first ever release was simply superb. Run-and-gun games didn't get much better than *Gunstar Heroes*.



» [Mega Drive] Football the *FIFA* way… and no, we don't mean alleged corruption or back handers…



» [Mega Drive] A platform game featuring Ronald McDonald? Sounds awful. You would be wrong.



SEPTEMBER 1993 – Diamond out, Diamond geezer in, CD no-go for Nintendo, CD32 says hello, Sega finds Treasure in Gunstar Heroes, and EA and FIFA begin a beautiful friendship. Richard Burton discovers the 2026 World Cup will be held in EA's car park…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1993

The third series of Channel 4's *Gamesmaster* was to air on 9 September but without host Dominik Diamond. The double entendre-loving Scot had been replaced by Dexter Fletcher who wasn't well received with his 'Cor blimey, Guvnor', in-your-face style of presenting.

For the first time there was definite confirmation from Nintendo, as well as extensive features by periodicals of the time, that its long-awaited Super Nintendo CD-ROM add-on was dead and buried.

It appears that Nintendo thought that the quality of games for similar CD based machines, such as Sega's Mega-CD, just wasn't good enough. Other possibilities bandied about by magazines were that Nintendo thought that the format wasn't worth persevering with, as rival machines such as the recently released 3DO, the PC-Engine Duo and Philips CDi all looked better prospects and had a head-start in terms of sales and marketing against Nintendo's potential offering.

Also, with similar CD systems like Commodore's CDTV flopping badly, maybe the smart money was on the production of a newer, more powerful console, rather than playing catch-up to existing technology. With this, the Nintendo rumour mill began with a leak that the company was to push on with a new 32-bit console, which it hoped would be available by around 1995/96.



» [The Amiga CD32 – its UK shelf life from release to discontinuation was just eight months.

The system would be incompatible with the Super Nintendo and priced higher than the SNES. And so, the first inklings of what would eventually become the N64 came to light…

Commodore took a different view and was solidly backing the CD format. Its Amiga CD32 was released this month, and soon become the best-selling CD format console of 1993, even with only four months of the year remaining. Unfortunately, it was a bittersweet story for the CD32. Commodore's initial target for the console was to sell 180,000 units by year end; although selling well, Commodore couldn't keep up with demand due to a components shortage.

With the CD32 not on sale, Commodore was treading water and finally succumbed to bankruptcy in April 1994, with a total of 100,000 Amiga CD32 estimated to have been sold.

Not known for its big movie licensing deals, Alternative Software revelled in the news that it had acquired, developed and completed work on *Suburban Commando*, the Hulk Hogan movie, for the Amiga and C64. The movie was very run-of-the-mill and the game proved to be just as mediocre, and let down badly by just



» [Amiga] A success in its earlier console incarnations, the Amiga conversion turned out to be hugely playable too.



» [Amiga] 'Whatcha going to do brother, when *Suburban Commando* Mania runs wild on you?' Yawn a bit probably…

SEPTEMBER 1993 NEWS



» [PC] You are the Stranger. You find a book that takes you to the mysterious and immersive adventure island of *Myst*…

23 September saw the end of a two-year experiment in Biosphere 2, an artificial closed ecosystem that explored the interactions between life systems and the potential of such systems in space colonization. Opinion was split as to the validity of the project, with some citing it as the most exciting event since the moon landings, while others felt it to be "New Age drivel masquerading as science".

24 September saw the release of the graphical adventure *Myst* by Brøderbund. The atmospheric nature of the game meant that you could totally immerse yourself in the island world of *Myst*. Although first-person adventures were commonplace, *Myst* was different in that the pace of the game was relaxed. There were no time limitations, you couldn't die and there was no violence as you explore the deserted island. With very little knowledge of why you are there and what you have to do, you explore at your own pace solving puzzles and discovering more of the mysterious island as you go. The tone and atmosphere of *Myst* appeared to hit the right note, with the game becoming the best selling PC game of the Nineties, selling around six million copies.



» No, it's not Mos Eisley, that's a very expensive science lesson you're looking at.

how easy it was to complete. Four levels, three bosses and virtually no challenge whatsoever, so, nice while it lasted… which wasn't very long…

Codemasters also had Amiga conversion news, with its hit Mega Drive game *Micro Machines* released on the Commodore system. It proved to be every bit as playable and fun as the original, and driving around half-eaten potato waffles, weaving in and out of marbles and avoiding pencils had never been so enjoyable.

It seemed like just a few months since two McDonald's licensed games had been released – *Global Gladiators* and *MC Kids/McDonaldland* – yet the purveyor of meat based treats had sold its name again, this time to Sega, who farmed the development out to Treasure Co. Ltd. Its new Mega Drive project was *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure,* and was a side-scrolling adventure this time featuring Ronald McDonald. Similar to the two previous licensed games, the result would be a solid, playable game.

Sega and Treasure's first collaboration was completed and released this month in the US and Japan, and it would be a damn sight more attractive than any Egg McMuffin… side-scroller *Gunstar Heroes* was Treasure's introduction to game development, and must surely go down as one of the best debuts ever. The hugely playable game allowed for multiple weapon combinations, had large, impressive bosses with smooth sprite-scaling and ran at a frenetic pace. *Gunstar Heroes* was a pinned-on future classic and quite rightly so.





» [Arcade] Blood and gruesome fatality finishing moves helped *Mortal Kombat* to good sales and plenty of column inches…

Electronic Arts was ready to kick-off its new football franchise, *FIFA International Soccer.* With versions being made for everything from Sega Mega-CD, 3DO and SNES, EA pinned its hopes on this officially endorsed FIFA game pulling in the armchair fans for big Christmas sales. Needless to say, this first game in the ever-expanding franchise sold extremely well. The only possible exception was the Amiga version, which was just plain awful.

Reviews time, and *Amiga Power*'s panel cogitated over the newest batch of Amiga offerings with *Soccer Kid* (Krisalis), *Blob* (Core Design), *One Step Beyond* (Ocean), *The Addams Family* (Hit Squad) and *Project-X* (Team 17) rating highest. *Sega Force Mega* had cast its well-honed eye across this month's Mega Drive releases with *Mortal Kombat* (Acclaim), *F1* (Domark), *Final Fight CD* (Capcom, Mega-CD), *Snow Brothers* (Tengen), *Andre Agassi Tennis* (Techmagik), *Technoclash* (Electronic Arts) and *B.O.B* (Electronic Arts) wiping the floor with the rest. *Super Play* had some big-hitting SNES games to assess. Among the cream were *Super Mario Collection* (Nintendo), *Street Fighter II Turbo* (Capcom), *Mortal Kombat* (Acclaim), *Battletoads In Battlemaniacs* (Trade West), *Super Family Tennis* (Namcot) and *First Samurai* (Kemco).

THIS MONTH IN…

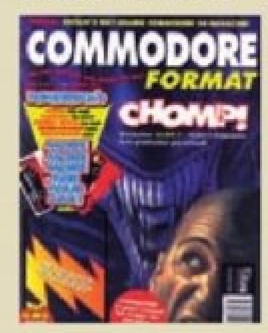
MEAN MACHINES SEGA



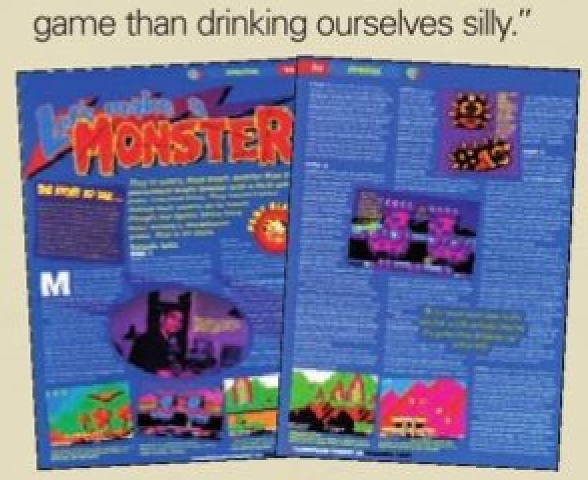
A news exclusive graced *Mean Machines* with details of Sega's new console, the Saturn. Aside from the impressive specs, the real eye opener was the Saturn's concept drawing… which was nothing like the finished version.



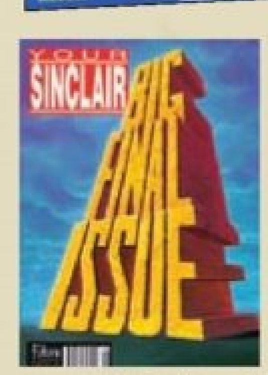
COMMODORE FORMAT



A developer diary for *Mayhem In Monsterland* for the C64 continued with Steve Rowland's news of a big spiky cucumber monster and the revelation that "we've spent more time in the past few weeks actually playing the game than drinking ourselves silly."



YOUR SINCLAIR

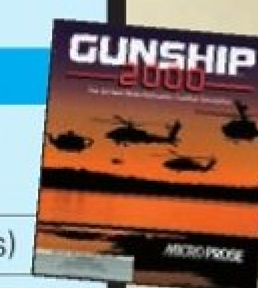


And so to bed, as the last Spectrum-specific magazine folds, ending with a riding-off-into-the-sunset shot and the line 'Our work here is done'. The final Trainspotter Award (given for finding glaring errors) went to one Stuart Campbell, who spotted a mistake in his own feature.



CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 1993



AMIGA

1. Gunship 2000 (MicroProse)
2. Goal! (Virgin Games)
3. Syndicate (Electronic Arts)
4. Championship Manager '93 (Domark)
5. World Class Cricket (Audiogenic)



SNES

1. Starwing (Nintendo
2. Alien 3 (LJN)
3. WWF Royal Rumble (LJN)
4. Super Star Wars (JVC)
5. Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)



COMMODORE 64

1. Street Fighter 2 (US Gold)
2. WWF Wrestlemania (Hit Squad)
3. Rodland (Kixx)
4. Terminator 2 (Hit Squad)
5. Pro Tennis Tour (Hit Squad)

MUSIC

1. Mr Vain (Culture Beat)
2. Boom! Shake The Room (DJ Jazzy Jeff & Fresh Prince)
3. Go West (Pet Shop Boys)
4. It Keeps Rainin' (Tears From My Eyes) – (Bitty McLean)
5. Right Here (SWV)



Go To Hell

IF THERE'S A HELL, THIS GAME IS THERE

#34



» ZX SPECTRUM
» TRIPLE SIX
» 1985

If you young kids think you invented controversial horror games, with your *Dante's Inferno*, *Manhunt* and *Splatterhouse*, think again, because back in the Eighties we had our share of *Daily Mail* reader shock and outrage too.

The horror and the outrage that greeted this game were astronomical. Sadly, it wasn't horror and outrage at the gory contents of the game. No. It was outrage at just how bad it actually was. And oh boy, was it a bad game.

Hell, it appears, consists of truly horrible colour clash graphics, and believe me they are frightening. Why, there's a man having his head sawn off with a saw that says 'DIE' written on it, in case he hadn't got the message from having his head sawn off. Look! There is a man being squashed between two spiked bricks, a big red dragon and some gravestones that shoot fireballs at you. If you want, you can fire crucifixes back at the monsters, but in practice this is quite hard to manage.

It plays a little like *Berzerk* in that you negotiate a maze and shoot monsters. However, while *Berzerk* is a great game, *Go To Hell* is not. It's wheezy and arthritic, with the main character swanning around with no sense of urgency. I'm sure there is a point to *Go To Hell*, but I can't for the life of me remember what it was. I think the developers put more effort into trying to be 'out there and edgy' and forgot to write a decent game.

As a small boy I really wanted this game. I'd read the *Crash* review and although they hated it, I wanted to see people's heads sawn off – what young boy didn't? It took me until three years ago to play this, and the full disturbing truth soon became apparent. It hadn't been worth the wait. As Kevin from *The Wonder Years* would say, I learnt something that day. I'm just not sure what. *





RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** IAN MARKS
- » **JOINED:** 17 AUGUST 2008
- » **LOCATION:** EAST MIDLANDS
- » **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
- » **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** ZX SPECTRUM

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The Bluffer's Guide To:

Isometric Games

Debuting in arcades before finding a final resting place on personal computers, the isometric point of view is one that has clearly been gradually outmoded by advances in game graphics. **Stuart Hunt**, with help from Sandy White and Jon Ritman, looks at the rise and gradual fading of this once great king of videogame perspectives



Like most things associated with videogames, the inception of the isometric viewpoint can be traced to arcades. 1982 is the year that marks the release of two quite contrasting arcade games that garnered much attention for utilising a skewed visual perspective that wasn't quite side-on and wasn't quite top-down either. The first was Sega's *Zaxxon*, a shoot-'em-up in which players had to storm a floating enemy base to destroy a large, boxy-looking robot that resembled a jukebox; and the second was *Q*bert*, a game about an orange nose repainting panels of Escher-style pyramids using the bottom of his feet.

With just two titles to its name, at this early point the term 'isometric game' clearly hadn't been adopted by gamers. It's a notion evidenced by *Zaxxon*'s title, which is said to have been inspired by the somewhat dry term 'axonometric projection': the umbrella name by which the three marginally different flavours of a parallel projection – isometric, diametric and trimetric – are all grouped. Had, of course, the word been 'isometric', the game's title would have been *Zissom*. To be fair to *Zaxxon*, though, axonometric is actually a more accurate term to classify isometric games for the reason that most use a method of diametric projection, in which only two of the three angles across the three axes measure the same, rather than 'true' isometric, whereby all of the three angles intersecting the three axes are equal. Confusing matters further, there are some games, such as *SimCity* and *Paperboy*, that use trimetric, a method of parallel projection in which all three angles are unequal.

As we're on the subject of what is and isn't isometric, here is probably a good time to clear up exactly what our classification of an isometric game is, to avoid confusion and us receiving a flood of angry letters. To help us explain, simply pick a corner of any normal four-walled room, walk directly into that corner until you can't walk any more, turn yourself 180 degrees, and then position your shoulders so that they are evenly rested against the two sides of the wall that make up that corner. Now make a mental note of how everything looks. If you're playing a game that gives you even the slightest impression that you're observing its world in this peculiar way, chances are it's probably what we would deem to be 'isometric'.

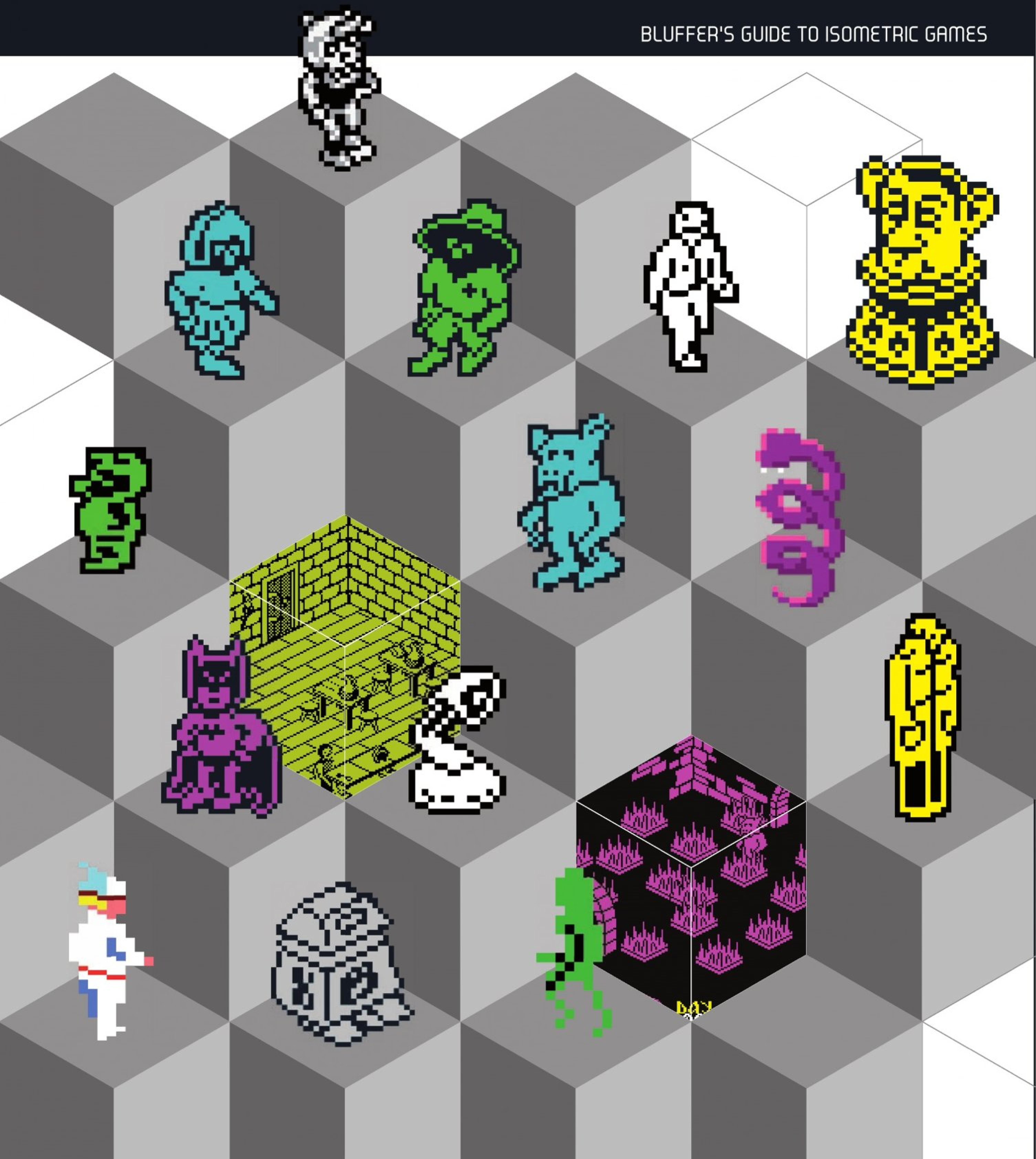
Before the advent of isometric projection, 3D game worlds existed but were constructed using a vector graphics generator, and the earliest examples of this can be seen in Atari's *Battlezone* and *Red Baron*, both released in 1980. While this technique was certainly effective in creating immersive games, these vector-generated 3D worlds did feel sparse and lacking in colour – many relied on the use of colour overlays. Isometric projection allowed developers to get around many of these issues and allowed 3D



» Sandy White told us that one of the benefits of the isometric perspective is that it is a handy way to create 3D worlds with limited computing power.



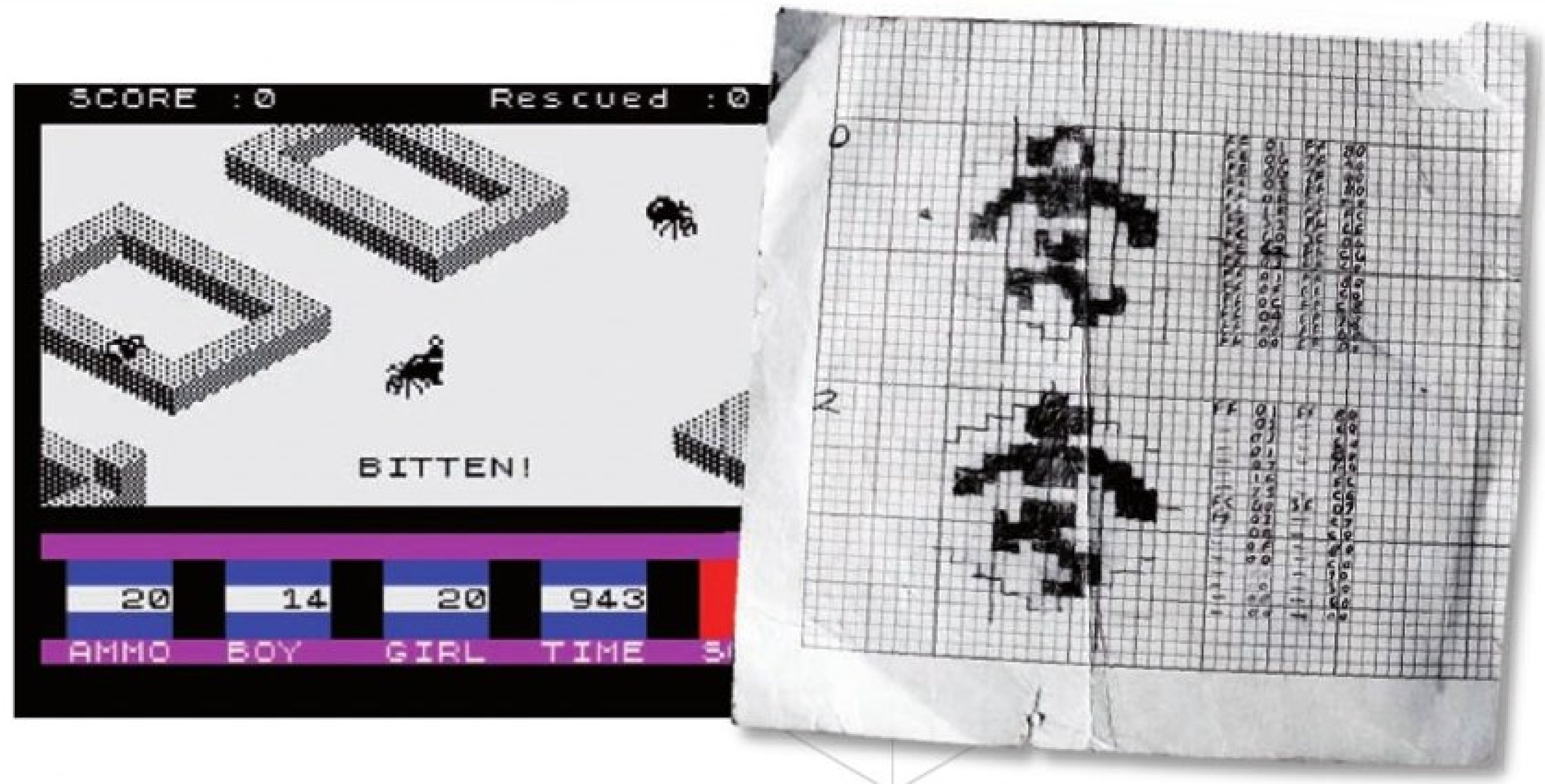
» Jon Ritman was 'blown away' when he first saw *Knight Lore* running, likening it to playing a Disney cartoon at the time.



worlds to be constructed using very little computer power and built using bitmaps and sprites, affording them colour and far more detail. Its fixed perspective also gave players far better perception of their environment, as they could see the full space surrounding their avatar without the need to move, making environments far easier for players to identify with.

As well as its distinct visuals, one of the things that set *Zaxxon* apart from other shoot-'em-ups of its day – with the obvious exception of *Red Baron* – was that success rested on deft flying as much as it did deft shooting. Victory couldn't just be achieved by adjusting your ship to the same altitude as incoming enemies and pressing fire; in an isometric game, you had to effectively mirror the full position of enemies on screen inside a 3D space. This is something that is inherent to the gameplay of all isometric real-time action games, coming into play in all sorts of scenarios, be it trying to jump on a platform, pick up an object or flick a switch. They literally require you to think in another dimension.

Surprisingly, when you consider that it was the first, *Zaxxon* is a game that clearly understood the complications this could pose on the poor brain of the player: it considerately provides players with an altimeter so that they can easily establish the height of their spaceship at all times – although *Battlezone* did a similar thing with radar. But while innovative, offering vertical movement on the y-axis clearly wasn't a popular one given that it was not adopted by subsequent isometric shooters, following the release of *Zaxxon* and its sequels. Likely for the reason that worrying about your ship's altitude distracts from the shooting, games such as Costa Panayi's *Highway Encounter* and SNK's *Viewpoint* kept things much simpler by setting their action on and close to ground level. Even *Zaxxon* dropped the feature for the sequel, *Zaxxon's Motherbase 2000*, replacing it with a jump mechanic.



"Isometric graphics made games far easier for players to identify with"



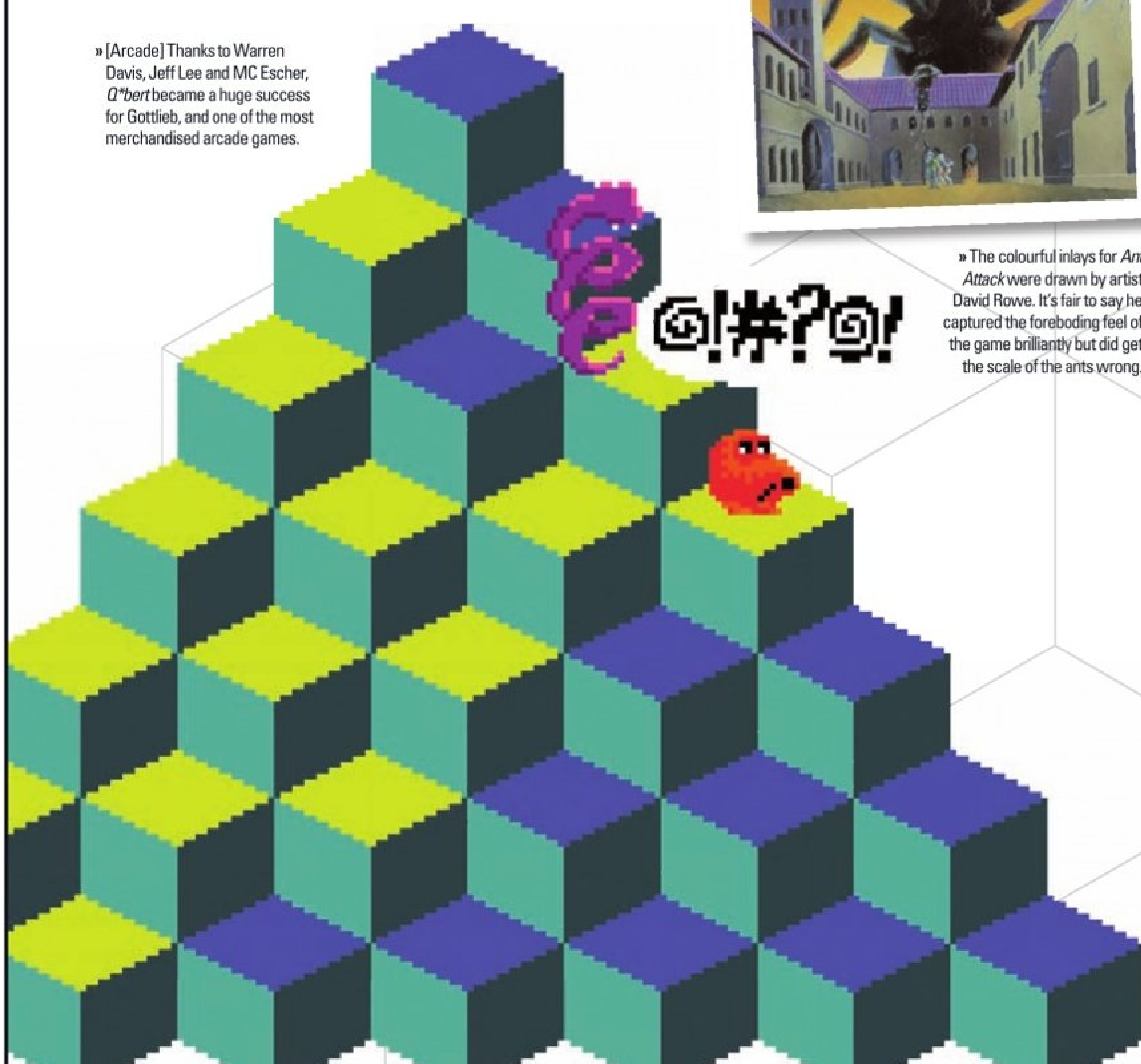
» The colourful inlays for *Ant Attack* were drawn by artist David Rowe. It's fair to say he captured the foreboding feel of the game brilliantly but did get the scale of the ants wrong.

It's this total movement in a 3D space that contributes to a common problem plaguing many early isometric games appearing on 8-bit home computers: controls. Most featured stiff four-way movement, and this affected the fluidity of gameplay and responsiveness of characters. This was rarely an issue in arcades, though, with a number of developers considering how best to cater for skewed movement in an isometric environment. *Q*bert*, for instance, featured a four-way joystick positioned diagonally to ape the slant of the titular character's movement around the pyramid, *Marble Madness* used a trackball control system, and *Paperboy* even used replica handlebars. Over time, software developers began to rethink how movement could work better in an isometric projected 3D space and made better use of joysticks and D-pads to offer players eight-way movement. System 3 even went so far as to introduce the fancy-sounding 'Relative Movement' system for *The Last Ninja*, which utilised a combination of joystick and simultaneous fire button holds to beckon an exhaustive number of moves from the game's ninja.

Antescher: ants meet Escher

Written by Sandy White, with some help with artwork from his then-girlfriend, Angela Sutherland, *Ant Attack* is a landmark game in the history of isometric games. Released for the Spectrum in 1983, it is notable for being the first isometric game to offer players the freedom to basically drag the camera wherever they fancied in the game world, also allowing players to rotate the camera clockwise and anticlockwise between four angles, ensuring that they always had the best possible view of the action. Sandy's innovative engine, named Softsolid 3D, was developed on the Acorn Atom and put to use on the Spectrum, making it one of the first machine-independent graphics engines ever made. *Ant Attack* not only birthed what the *GTA III* generation now like to call the 'sandbox' game, owing to its free-form gameplay set in a large static world, but can also be seen as the first application of isometric visuals in an adventure setting – a relationship that flourished in the years to come.

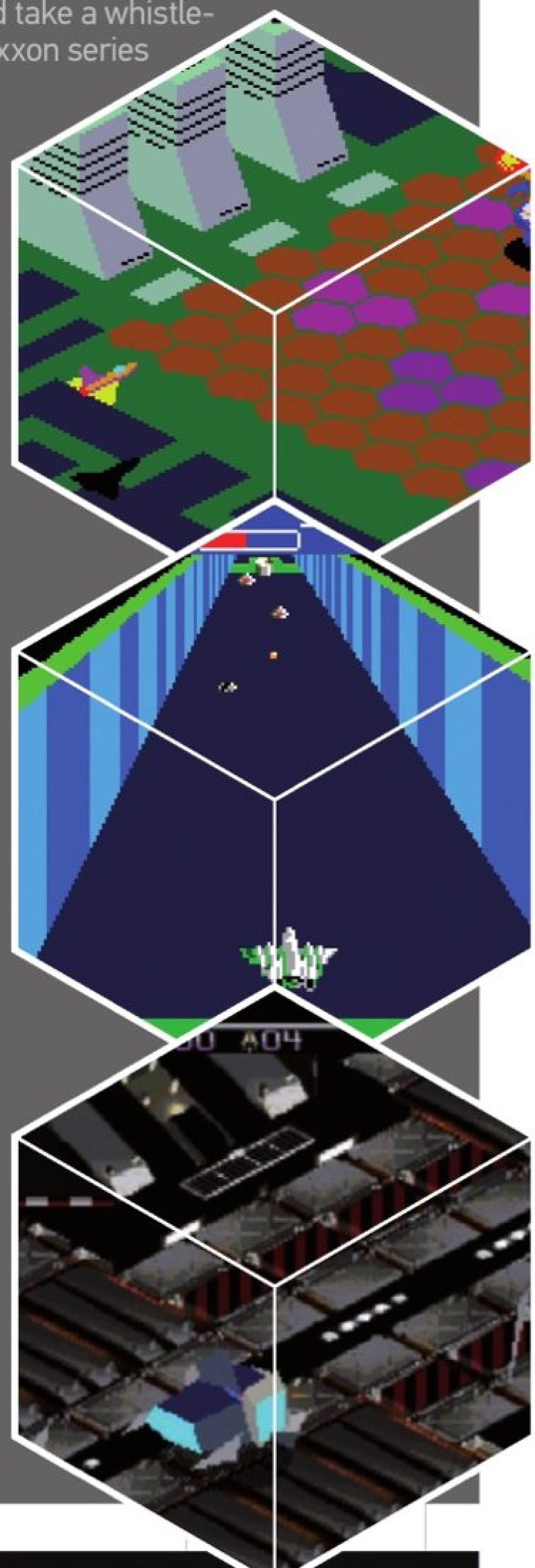
Sandy explains how he came up with his groundbreaking 3D engine: "The Atom was the first computer I'd had access to which had bitmapped graphics. I think it could do 64x64 pixels in four colours – not state-of-the-art even then, but the point was I had one, and while trying to earn a little money writing some business app for someone, I had discovered that it could generate shapes on screen. Now I had a plan to make some kind of virtual artwork and started experimenting with graphics using Atom BASIC. I remember it being pretty easy to get the Atom to generate random lines and rectangles, but I wanted something three-dimensional.



» [Arcade] Thanks to Warren Davis, Jeff Lee and MC Escher, *Q*bert* became a huge success for Gottlieb, and one of the most merchandised arcade games.

The Mini History Of Zaxxon

Given that it's the first, we thought we'd take a whistle-stop tour of all the games in Sega's Zaxxon series



Super Zaxxon / Arcade / 1982

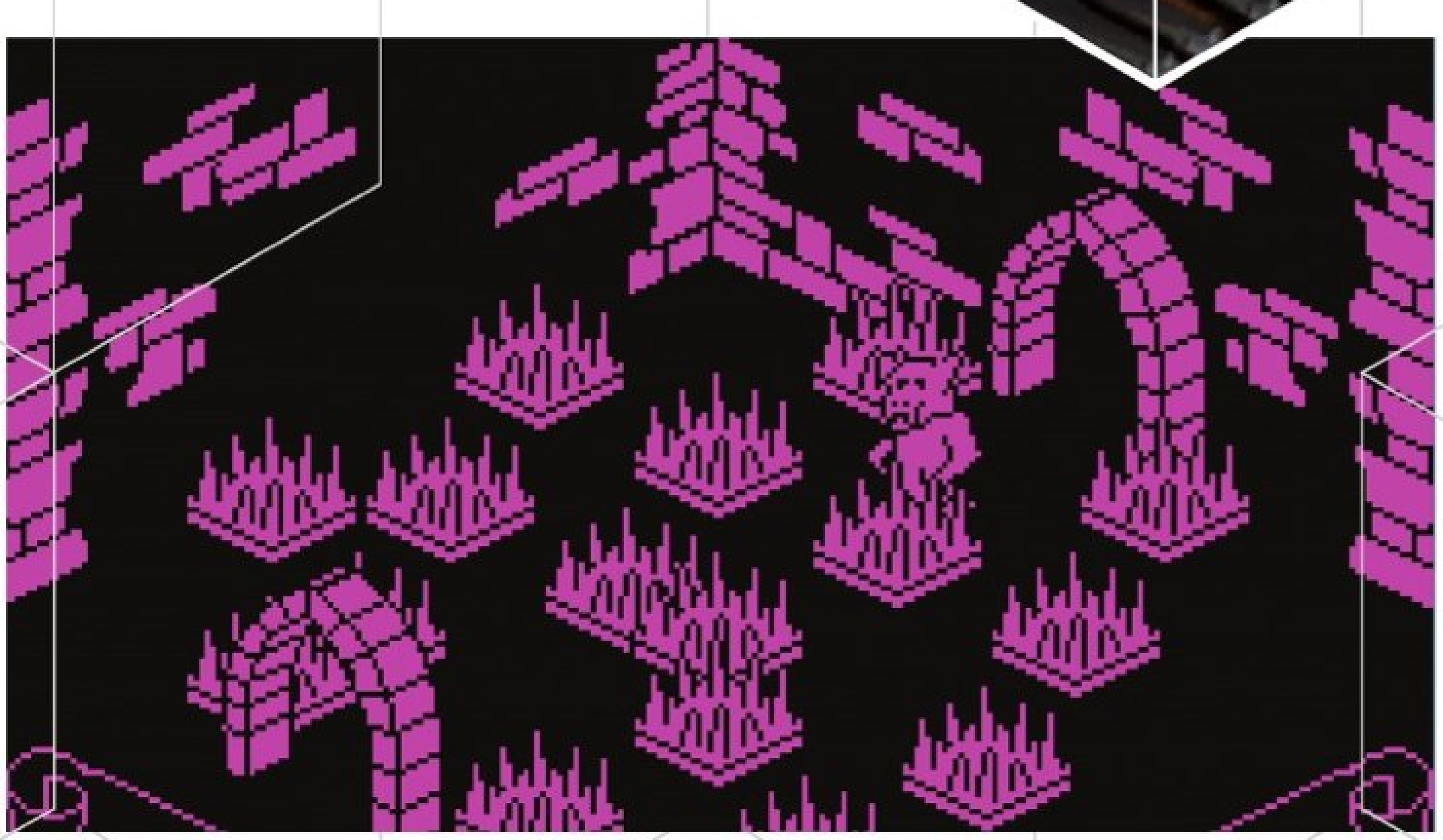
Following the success of *Zaxxon*, Sega promptly turned out a sequel in the same year. As you would expect, given its speedy turnaround, *Super Zaxxon* plays more like *Zaxxon 1.5* and features some tweaks to the original game to make it more challenging. These include a two-player mode, having your ship move faster, altered level layouts – including the frustrating dogfight section in the original replaced with a tunnel fight – and a few new enemies, including the Zaxxon robot being bizarrely replaced by a trio of robot Chinese dragons. Sega even ported this version to a small number of 8-bit computers, including the Commodore 64.

Zaxxon 3D / Master System / 1987

Doubling up its 3D-ness by making use of Sega Scope – the 3D glasses released for the Master System – *Zaxxon 3D* is a weird into-the-screen take on Sega's seminal isometric shooter. It shares very little similarity with the arcade game it's based on and begins with a fiddly dogfight in space, before changing into something that feels a bit more *Zaxxon*-like as you guide your ship down a corridor primed with gun emplacements, brick walls and fuel cylinders to shoot. Each level then ends with a boss fight. It's okay but feels bugger all like *Zaxxon*.

Zaxxon's Motherbase 2000 / 32X / 1995

Released exclusively for Sega's ill-fated Mega Drive life-support machine, *Zaxxon's Motherbase 2000* is an ugly-looking sequel that mixes 2D-rendered diagonally scrolling backgrounds – as opposed to clean, crisp, isometric ones – with crude, jaggy-looking polygon ships and robotic enemies. The most novel aspect of the game is that your underpowered ship has the bizarre ability to jump inside secondary insect-style vehicles in the game and use their firepower. Ultimately, the game is more *Viewpoint* than *Zaxxon*, as the action always remains close to ground level.





"With a bit of head-scratching, I worked out how to get it to plot a three-dimensional cube. It turns out that if you plot a line in bitmapped graphics by going along two pixels, up one pixel, along two, up one and so on, it is a nice fit for drawing the top face of a 3D cube. Remember that old protractor you used to use at school – or is that just me? – for doing isometric projections: 30/60 degrees? It turns out two pixels along for every one up makes angles of 26.6/63.4 degrees: so close to old protractor angles that even old Mr Steel the tech teacher would have approved. So it turns out that my art project was drawing 'isometric' shapes, even though I hadn't recognised them as such. The big excitement came when I wrote a loop to plot these cubes at random positions on the screen and suddenly saw wonderful foreign, exotic cityscapes growing and sprawling before my eyes: walls and tower blocks; ditches and embankments appearing and disappearing. I remember getting that feeling in my gut where you go: 'There's something special about this.'"

Despite the game's ant-infested city of Antescher comprising simple monochromatic blocks, *Ant Attack* succeeded in feeling more immersive than most 2D games loaded with sprites and colour, showing brilliantly how it's the world that is the beating heart of every classic isometric game.

Released the following year, *Knight Lore*, Ultimate Play The Game's second groundbreaking sequel to *Sabre Wulf*, transformed the face of isometric games. Written by Tim and Chris Stamper, the game's innovative flick-screen isometric engine, coined 'Filmation' by the brothers, created the most detailed-looking environments ever seen on 8-bit computers and quickly jetted isometric games – and Ultimate – to prominence.

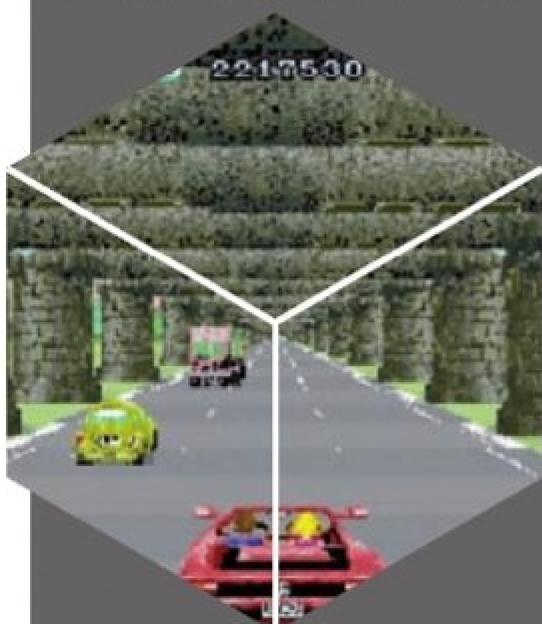
Set inside a wizard's castle, *Knight Lore* saw the popular pith-helmeted adventurer Sabreman on a quest to cure a case of lycanthropy, and the impressive power of Filmation filled its gothic world with lavish detail and a variety of objects to use and manipulate. Not only were *Knight Lore*'s isometric rooms beautifully drawn and dressed, but the engine's distinct look gave the graphics a striking and beautiful cartoon quality that left both gamers and critics alike suitably slack-jawed.

"I think everyone was surprised by *Ant Attack*, but the simplistic graphics meant it was never going to have the impact that the later *Knight Lore* undoubtedly had", remembers Jon Ritman, coder of the classic isometric games *Batman* and *Head Over Heels*. "I was blown away when I first saw *Knight Lore* and still remember the moment – a gamer's version of remembering where you were when you heard Kennedy or Lennon had been shot. For me, it was a simple feeling of playing a Disney cartoon: exactly what I wanted in a game. There had, of course, been 3D games before, but they had all been first-person and a lot of people had problems grasping that when combined with the simplistic vector graphics that were used for them. The isometric system was much easier for the player to instinctively understand."

Owing to its popularity, Ultimate swiftly followed up *Knight Lore* with two more Filmation games: *Alien 8* in 1984 and the fourth and final 'released' game in its Sabreman series, *Pentagram*, in

Alternate Dimensions

We look at a few of the other methods used by developers to create depth in game worlds



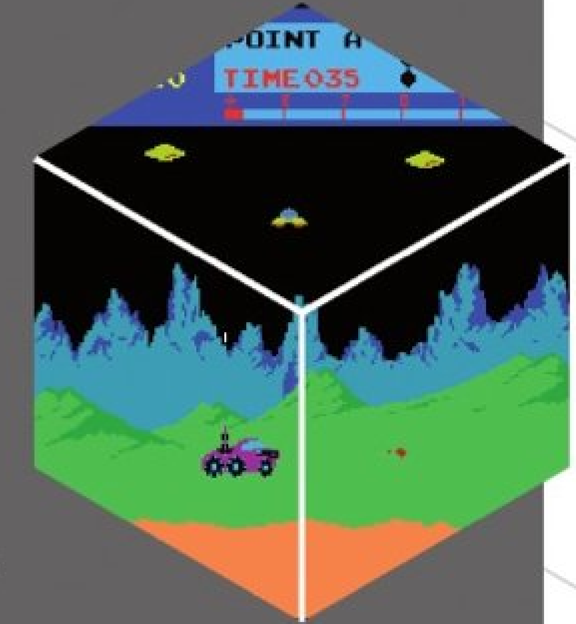
Rotoscoping

A basic method of motion capture popularised by the band a-ha and utilised in games such as *Karateka*, *Prince Of Persia* and *Flashback*. The rotoscoping technique basically involves artists meticulously tracing over live-action film, frame by frame, to ensure smoother and more realistic animation for characters in games. These are usually human, although the method works on all animals.



Vector graphics

Atari's *Battlezone* was a revelation. Notable for being the first game to plonk players inside an immersive 3D world, it achieved this sensation through clever manipulation of a vector generator developed by Howard Delman. Programmed by Ed Rotberg, *Battlezone* was a 3D tank combat simulator inspired by early top-down tank games. The 3D technique was also used in Atari's *Red Baron*.



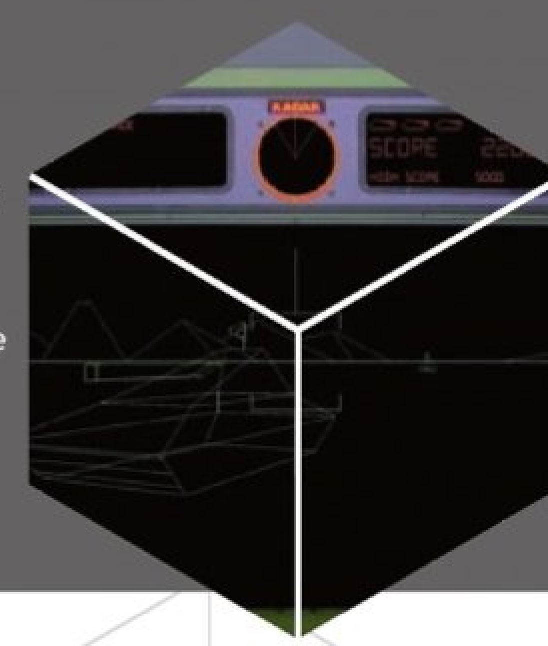
Sprite scaling

Sprite scaling is a technique that is most commonly used in racing games. Seen in pretty much everything that Sega put out in arcades during the early Nineties, it is used to offer the sensation that you are moving forward by getting background sprites to gradually and simultaneously increase in size, usually whenever the user accelerates in the game.



Clay animation

One of the forms of stop-motion animation, clay animation has only been used in a handful of videogames over the years, including *ClayFighter*, *The Neverhood* and *Primal Rage*. It is a method by which characters and worlds are modelled in clay, or an equally pliable material, and then each individual frame of animation is meticulously modelled and photographed before then being rendered.



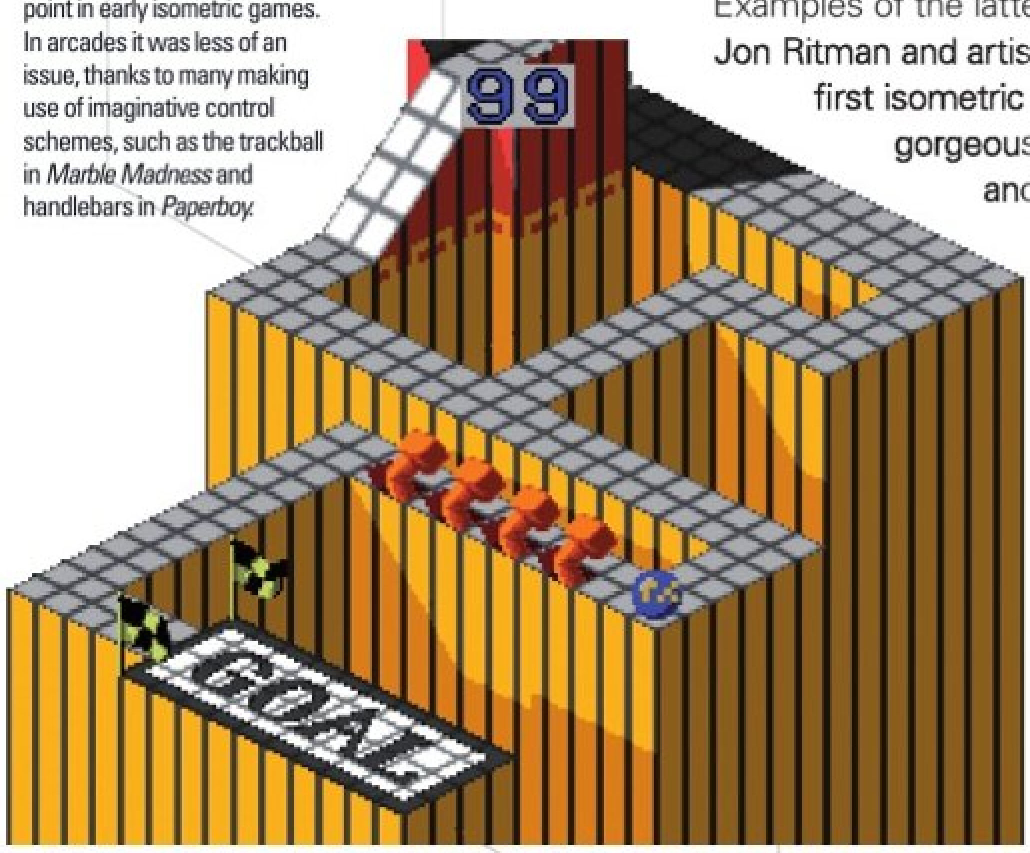
Parallax scrolling

Parallax scrolling is a simple technique, commonly seen in side-scrolling games. The world is divided into layers, with those furthest away scrolling slower than the foreground, giving the illusion of depth. In some games, to add a further level of immersion, an additional layer is added in front of the playfield. The technique first appeared in Irem's *Moon Patrol* in 1982.

1986. Nestled between the release of these games, though, was another important Ultimate title; one running from a revised version of the Filmation engine. Debuting in the 1985 game *Night Shade*, Filmation II featured a number of enhancements. Not only could it produce smooth isometric scrolling, but it was also able to make sections of the environment transparent so as to never obscure the main character from view. This trick allowed Ultimate to incorporate multiple buildings in its Filmation II games, making its worlds feel more open.

The Knight Lore Effect

Knight Lore had a significant impact on 8-bit gaming and would kick open the floodgates, causing a wave of similar-looking isometric titles from other developers to appear on home computers. While a great many of these titles were quite derivative – and many more entirely forgettable – there was also a raft of great ones.



» [Arcade] Controls are a sticky point in early isometric games. In arcades it was less of an issue, thanks to many making use of imaginative control schemes, such as the trackball in *Marble Madness* and handlebars in *Paperboy*.

Examples of the latter included all the games by coder Jon Ritman and artist Bernie Drummond. The duo's first isometric game, *Batman*, was a polished and gorgeous Filmation-style action-adventure, and is notable for being the first videogame to ever star DC's famous Caped Crusader. But it was Ritman and Drummond's second collaboration, *Head Over Heels*, which many consider to be their finest hour. One of, if not the, best isometric games of all time, *Head Over Heels* utilised an enhanced version of the *Batman* engine that allowed players to switch control between two characters at any point during the game. While a similar feature could be first seen in the isometric adventure game *Pyracurse* by Hewson Consultants in 1986, never had it played such a prominent role in the gameplay, with Head and Foot having to split up and work together to solve puzzles in the game. A popular mechanic, it was Jon's original intention to incorporate this buddy system into *Batman*, and have Robin appear as a second playable character, but at the time he was unable to work out how to make such a feature work.

"There were several things that made writing isometric games harder than a standard 2D game," Jon says, when explaining to us some of the typical issues he faced when creating his isometric games. "The graphics were larger and also needed a separate mask doubling their size on the Spectrum; this, in turn, made the small amount of memory a problem, so many techniques had to be adopted to try and save space elsewhere. In the case of *Head Over Heels*, I used several methods, including bit-streaming and templates to reduce the map size to the minimum: 301 rooms in 5k, an average of only 17 bytes a room, and an empty room only taking 7 bytes to describe the wallpaper, the shape, door type, door position, flooring and colour scheme. In addition, there were complex calculations to sort the ordering of the objects in the room – actually an impossible thing to get correct 100 per cent of the time – and finally the masking system for drawing the images. Again, space was of the essence here: *Knight Lore* used a 6k buffer to manage the masking; *Head Over Heels* did it with only 256 bytes."

One of the most surreal 8-bit games to ever find release, *Head Over Heels* saw players help two intergalactic spies, Headlus Mouthion and Footus Underium, bring liberation to a cluster of planets and defeat the evil 'Emperor'. Chock full of bizarre creations conjured up by the fertile imagination of Drummond, with the Prince Charles Dalek, who acts like a forklift, clearly the standout, *Head Over Heels* was a brilliantly crafted adventure game and remains one of the most popular and original isometric games ever. Contrasting the outlandishness of *Head Over Heels*, though, the mid-Eighties also saw the isometric viewpoint being

used by many developers to create cinematic, character-driven graphic 'adventure movies'.

Bo Jangeborg's *Fairlight* is one such title. Creating his own impressive engine that could construct smooth-scrolling isometric worlds, *Fairlight* followed the story of a reluctant adventurer named Ishtar who is tricked into exploring a medieval castle to find a missing book for a sorcerer. With a notably less cartoon-like appearance to *Knight Lore*, Bo was clearly striving for realism with the game. This was certainly true for the game world, which featured objects that could be manipulated and abided to physics in a realistic way. For instance, Ishtar could push chairs faster than heavier objects like tables, and only had a limited space in his pockets to carry items, meaning that he would have to drop lighter items to free up carrying space for larger ones.

Two of the most popular isometric adventure games to find release were from Denton Designs. *The Great Escape* was an unofficial tie-in to the 1963 movie and was made famous for its unique and innovative gameplay. Set inside a German POW camp, players had to find a way to escape incarceration while being careful not to draw attention to their actions from the officious guards patrolling the prison. During your bid for freedom, other prisoners would be seen to go about their everyday business, which all helped make the world feel more atmospheric. With its spiritual follow-up, *Where Time Stood Still*, Denton took these ideas and expanded on them brilliantly, this time plonking players inside a dangerous lost world and giving them a small party of characters, some with their own unique skills needed to complete the game, to guard and rescue.

Other notable isometric adventures also included Dusko Dimitrijevic's *M.O.V.I.E.*, a film noir game in which players assumed the role of a gumshoe trying to retrieve an incriminating audio tape from the mob. The game is notable for a neat mechanic whereby players could interrogate and converse with other characters in the game. This particularly came into play with two twin sisters: one proved helpful in the mission while the other was working for the mob, and it was up to you to work out which sister you could trust. Failure to be a good judge of non-playable character would see you led into a trap and sleeping with the fishes.

A lesser-known adventure title deserving of just as much praise was *La Abadía Del Crimen* (*The Abbey Of Crime*). Written by Spaniard Paco Menéndez and released only in Spain, it was a truly stunning isometric adventure based on Umberto Eco's famous book *The Name Of The Rose*. In the game, players were called to a monastery to solve a mystery surrounding the disappearance of a monk. With stunningly detailed visuals for the time, this spectacular and immersive whodunnit is an adventure game that fans of the genre should definitely seek out. If you're interested, the best way is to play the English-translated version for the MSX2, which can be found at **computeremuzone.com/abadia/abadeng.php**.

Arguably, though, the most polished example of the isometric adventure was System 3's *The Last Ninja* (1987). Mixing elements of puzzle-solving, glorious Technicolor, exploration and armed combat, its detailed graphics – on the C64, at least – deep control system, great oriental tunes, and cinematic story provided the complete package and blew away anything else seen on home computers at the time.

So from a programming standpoint, what were the benefits of the isometric perspective and why was it so popular with many computer game developers in the Eighties? We put the question to Sandy White.

"It is simply a very convenient way to represent 3D when you have very little computing power," he answers. "I can sum it up in a single word: multiplies, as in x multiplied by y. Multiplies were time-consuming for your old 8-bit CPUs. I mean many, many times longer to calculate than adding or subtracting or shifting binary numbers, and you needed them to do 3D if you wanted perspective. Isometric equals convincing 3D with no perspective equals no multiplies equals fast on old 8-bitters! And because its angles fit nicely onto an array of square pixels, you could shove stuff around on screen using shifts and adds – cheap in 8-bit computing terms.

Sandy adds: "To put in perspective how unexpected the effect was at the time, at the press launch for *Ant Attack* there was an audible gasp from the assembled journalists when it first appeared on screen. I think I missed a trick, though: when asked by a reporter how to describe the graphics, I said 'isometric'. Bum! I remember him writing it down. I still fantasise that if I had just said 'Softsolid 3D', that would have gone into the lexicon instead, and I'd somehow be getting royalties"

Isometric Nineties

As game consoles began firmly replacing our beloved 8-bit micros so fewer isometric games started appearing on game shelves. This had nothing to do with the popularity or need of developers to utilise the perspective – even with the arrival of 16-bit consoles with powerful microprocessors, the viewpoint remained one of the very best methods to create detailed-looking 3D worlds on what was still fairly modest hardware – but rather the process of creating games had become more intricate and, in turn, development teams swelled and the volume of games produced began to fall. But while a console renaissance brought us some classic and memorable 2D titles, there were still a fair number of classic and inspired isometric titles too.

» [Mega Drive] EA's *Haunting* used isometric graphics to bring graphical realism to its mature themes.

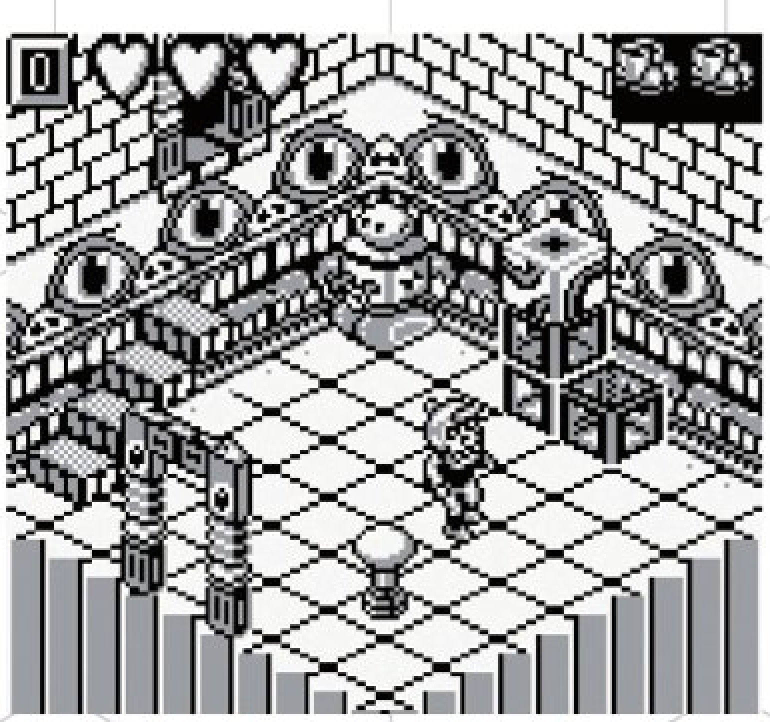


" Knight Lore kicked open the floodgates, causing a wave of isometric titles "



» [PC] By the late Nineties, the isometric viewpoint had found a comfortable home on PC monitors, thanks to games like *Diablo* and *Fallout*.

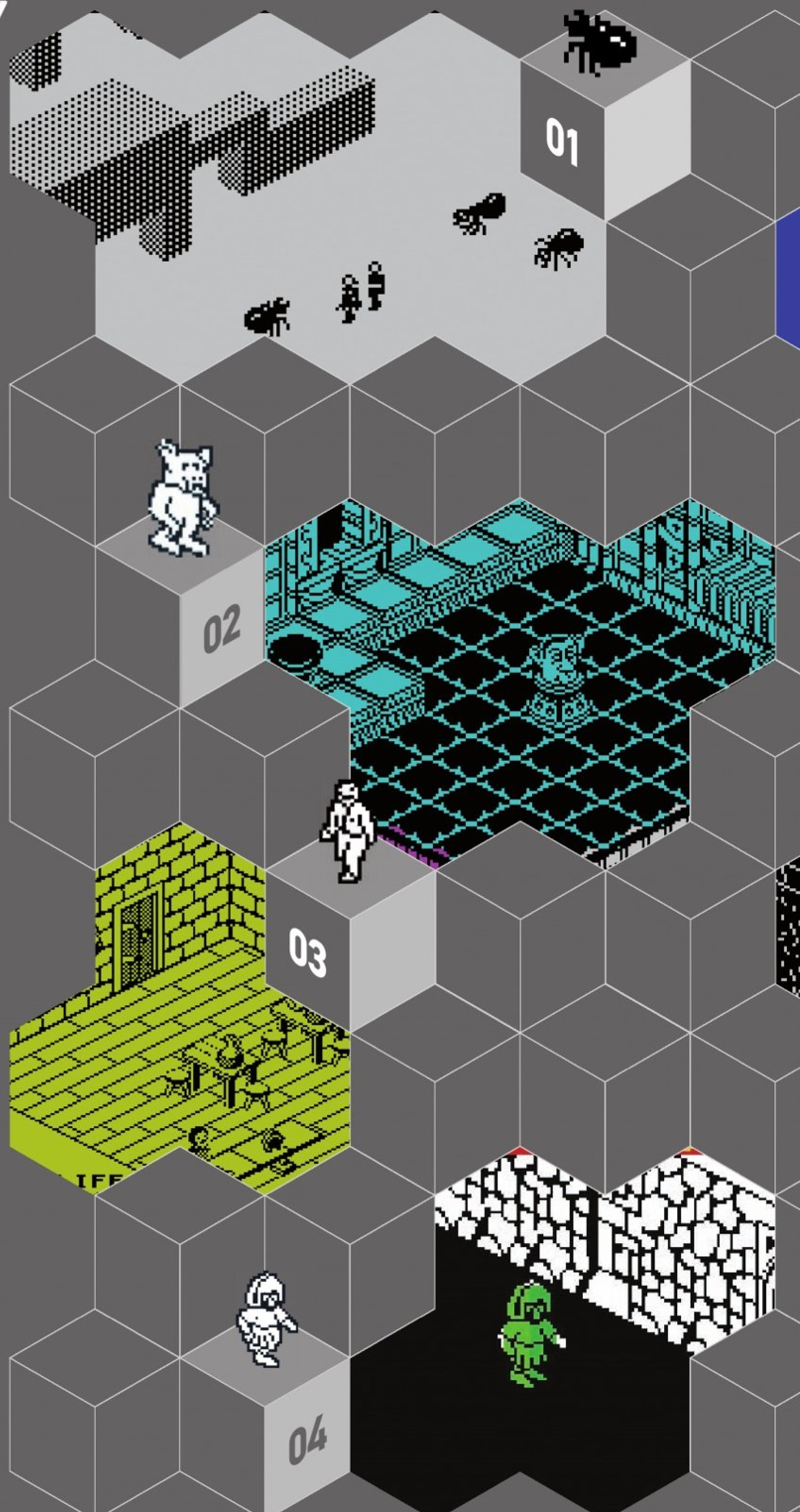






Where Time Stood Skew

We look back at some of the most notable 8-bit adventure games to see what it is they brought to axonometric tables



01. Ant Attack

- Released: 1983
- Publisher: Quicksilva
- Developer: Sandy White

Assuming the role of a faceless hero, Sandy White's seminal isometric smash saw players dropped into the blockish, bleak and giant-ant-riddled city of Antescher to find and escape with their lost love in tow. The first isometric game to allow players to go anywhere and explore an open 3D isometric world, *Ant Attack* changed the landscape of videogames.

02. Knight Lore

- Released: 1984
- Publisher: Ultimate Play The Game
- Developers: Tim and Chris Stamper

Ultimate's astounding *Sabre Wulf* sequel featured everyone's famous pith-helmeted adventurer on a quest to find the items needed to cure an acute case of lycanthropy. Set inside the exquisitely detailed walls of Knight Lore Castle, it is regarded as the 'true' progenitor of the isometric adventure genre, featured a number of objects to use, and has inspired countless other games and developers.

03. Fairlight

- Released: 1985
- Publisher: The Edge
- Developer: Bo Jangeborg

Fairlight, which comprises a series of two games, seems to get shamefully overlooked due to the impact of Ultimate's Filmation titles. But with its detailed visuals and stronger emphasis on realistic object manipulation, *Fairlight* can be seen as something really quite different from Ultimate's offerings. It's also one of the earliest examples of a mature take on isometric adventure games.

04. Night Shade

- Released: 1985
- Publisher: Ultimate Play The Game
- Developers: Tim and Chris Stamper

The enhanced power of Filmation II debuted in this game, *Night Shade*, and not only allowed for super-smooth scrolling of Filmation's detailed isometric graphics but also the power to make walls translucent. These features allowed Ultimate to construct more open worlds that featured outdoor sections and buildings to enter.

05. Batman

- Released: 1986
- Publisher: Ocean
- Developers: Jon Ritman, Bernie Drummond

Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's first collaborative project is probably most notable for being the first isometric 'adventure' game based on a licence, releasing in the same year as *Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes*. It may have featured a porky Caped Crusader and depicted the Batcave as some kind of bizarre house of horrors, but it's still a fantastic adventure game.

06. Pyracurse

- **Released:** 1986
- Publisher: Hewson Consultants
- Developers: Mark Goodall, Keith Prosser

Pyracurse was a smooth-scrolling isometric adventure game with an Aztec theme. Predating *Head Over Heels* and *Where Time Stood Still*, in *Pyracurse* players were assigned a party of four explorers, each with distinct attributes – Frozbie the dog, for example, could dig – and gameplay would involve switching control to make use of their individual skills.

07. M.O.V.I.E.

- Released: 1986
- Publisher: Ocean
- Developer: Dusko Dimitrijevic

M.O.V.I.E. saw you play the role of a private detective on the case of retrieving a sensitive tape from a mob hideout. As well as its non-fantasy setting helping set it apart from everything else, *M.O.V.I.E.* featured an innovative chat mechanic whereby a speech bubble would appear above your character's head, allowing you to fill it with commands using your keyboard and interact with characters in the game.

08. The Great Escape

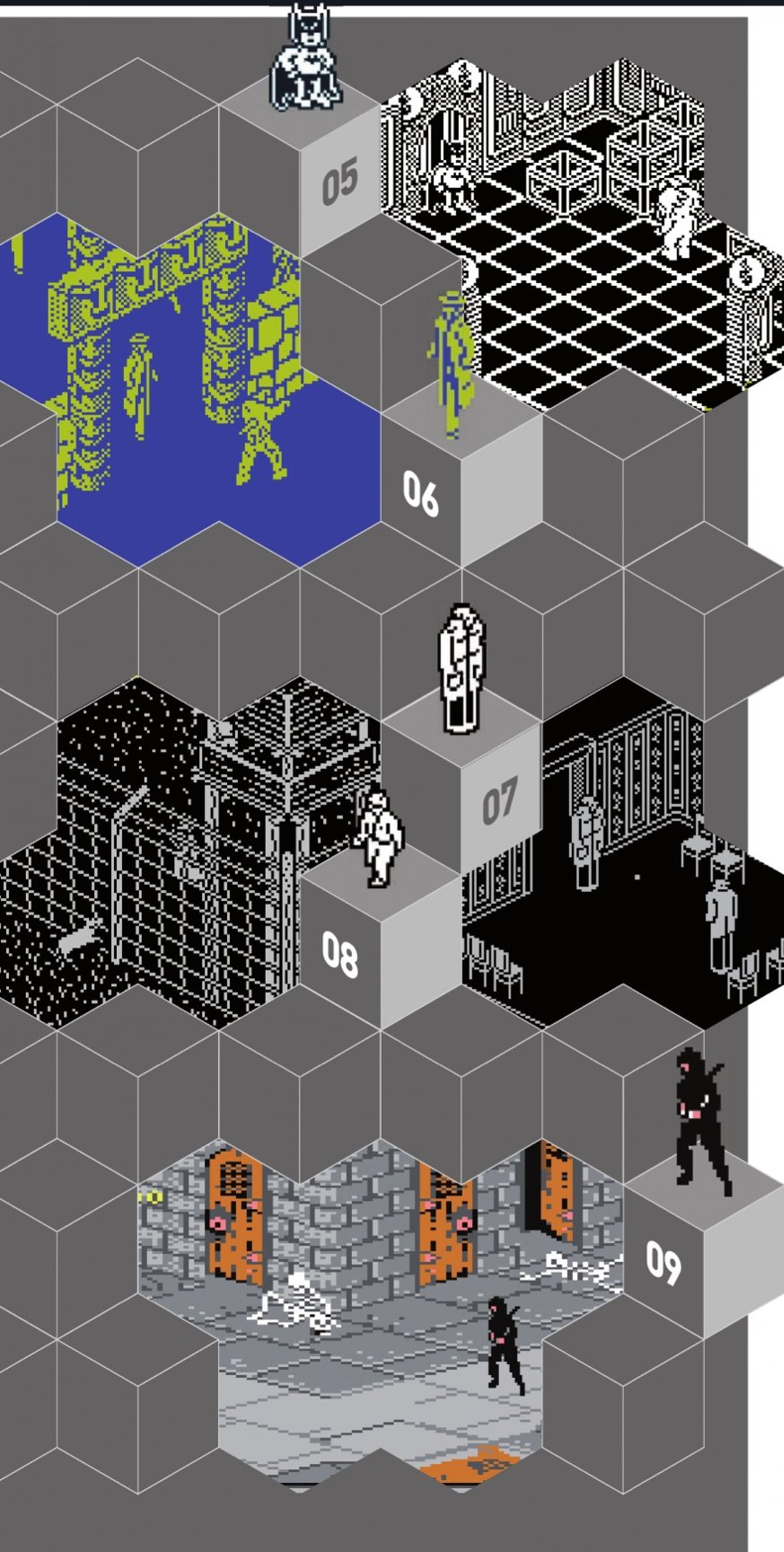
- Released: 1987
- Publisher: Ocean
- Developer: Denton Designs

Denton Designs' unofficial war movie tie-in tasked players with escaping from a German prisoner of war camp. Perpetually under the watchful glare of the prison guards, and with typical prison routines to abide by, it's *The Great Escape*'s innovative gameplay that sees it listed here. Although *M.O.V.I.E.* did pip it to the post in terms of featuring non-playable characters with a sense of personality, by instilling this level of detail into every facet of its world, few titles match *The Great Escape* for atmosphere.

09. The Last Ninja

- Released: 1987
- Publisher: System 3
- Developer: In-house

The Last Ninja series followed a typical tale of an aggrieved ninja on a globe-trotting mission to kill the person responsible for murdering his ninja mates. Selling over 2 million copies, the original game is one of the most successful C64 games of all time. It is proof of how popular 8-bit isometric adventures had become, and how impressive they looked with a splash of colour.



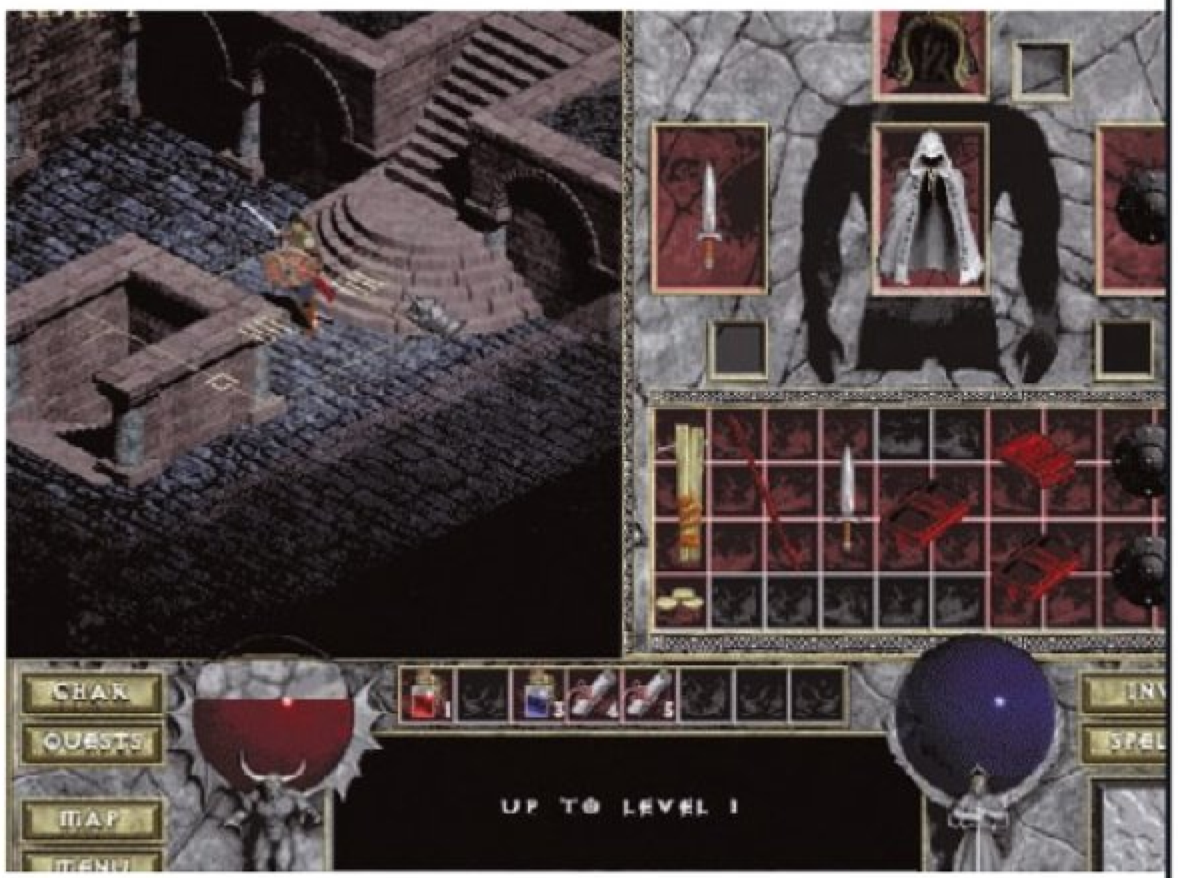
The Stamper brothers and Rare released a handful of classic isometric console games for the NES. The company's first was the seminal racer *RC Pro-Am*, which saw players steering remote-controlled cars around isometric racetracks. Rare's first big commercial hit for the console, *Pro-Am* inspired a number of isometric racers. Rare then followed this up with *Cobra Triangle* a year later, which switched the RC cars for speedboats and spiced up the racing with mission-based objectives; and the sublime *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll* in 1990. With gameplay that saw you helping snakes scoff their way to victory by unlocking exits with their weight, *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll* merged brilliantly the offbeat nature of games such as *Head Over Heels* with popular movement-based isometric action/puzzle titles like *Marble Madness* and Paul Shirley's *Spindizzy*.

During the 16-bit era, developers had continued to view the isometric perspective as a great means to construct detailed 3D worlds, and so it soon became used in adventure, RPG and strategy titles. From *Populous* to *Desert Strike*, *Little Big Adventure* to *Planescape: Torment*, *Command & Conquer* to *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, the isometric projection started to show its versatility by straddling various genres and demonstrating how, even after the Eighties, it was still being used to help create some of the most popular and classic videogames of all time.

With the arrival of fifth-generation CD-based consoles and their polygon-producing powers able to finally construct true 3D environments, most developers inevitably began moving away from isometric games. But the viewpoint's strengths – the ability to create detailed, packed-looking worlds and allow gamers to effortlessly view them – did keep it in work for a time thanks to popular PC game series such as *Civilization*, *The Sims* and *Diablo* although over time even these series have come to drop the forced perspective, instead opting for true 3D.

Looking today, the latest *Tomb Raider* outing, *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light*, is perhaps the biggest new release that can be seen utilising an isometric forced perspective – a nice irony when you consider that she was the pin-up for polygon-constructed game worlds in the mid to late Nineties. But while this excellent twin-stick shooter is proof that there's still life in the forced-perspective approach, it's plainly clear that there's no chance of it ever seeing a return to its past glory.

With a popular decade-long reign in the 3D spotlight since its emergence in 1982, though, the perspective, like sprites, has a distinct quality that helps games such as *Knight Lore* and *Head Over Heels* feel timeless, and, as we've discussed, has certainly given us some of the finest, most innovative and immersive game worlds in history.



» [PC] *Diablo* was a massively important addition to the genre, and its influence is still felt today. Its isometric style was copied in many similar RPGs including *Baldur's Gate* and the more recent *Torchlight*.

Classic game worlds fully charted for your pleasure

Mapped!

#01. Ant Attack

The city of Antescher has been overrun by giant ants! If you're going to save it, you'd better learn your way around…



Legend:

01 Finding someone's name on a piece of art is hardly new, but it's not every day that you discover that somebody has left his or her mark in an actual game world. Needless to say that's exactly what happened in *Ant Attack*. Tucked away in the top-left corner of the screen are Sandy's initials. It's rather weird the first time you discover it, but it somehow fits the beautifully abstract world.

02 This is your hero. You can play as a boy or a girl, but the objective is always the same: rescue your loved one from the ants.

03 Each game starts just outside the walls of Antescher. Your first rescue is just metres away, but as the game progresses you'll discover that your



What Ant Attack means to me

"I found this quite a difficult question to answer if I'm honest, mainly because it has meant so many different things to me over the years... First it was discovery, then excitement, then 15 minutes of fame and a year or two of fortune. These days, it's a bit like having an old friend who you are very fond of, have known forever, is slightly more sociable than you are, and who invites you to parties from time to time."

Sandy White
creator of Ant Attack

partner gets hidden in even more fiendish places. Needless to say, when you finally reach the safety of the city walls you'll breathe an enormous sigh of relief.

04 Located near the centre of Antescher is this rather impressive-looking pyramid. As you continually rescue more people, the ants get ever more numerous, and the large structure therefore becomes essential, as it acts as a good waypoint. The ants are unable to climb it, making it an ideal place to catch your breath and get your bearings before re-entering the fray.

05 This is the person you need to rescue. Their location changes on each level, so you'll need to thoroughly search the city to find them.

06 These huge, vicious ants constantly roam the grounds of Antescher, growing in number and aggression as you make more rescues. They can paralyse you with their bite but are susceptible to your ammo.

RETRO SHAMER

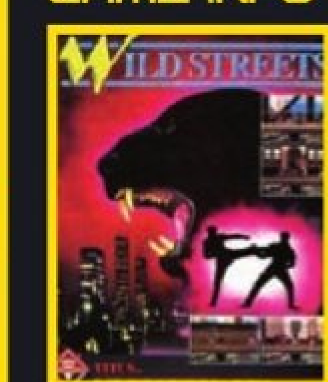
» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

WILD STREETS



» [C64] Unlike most beat-'em-ups, *Wild Streets* didn't feature any bosses to fight. What would Titus have come up with?

GAME INFO



- » **SYSTEM:** COMMODORE 64
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PUBLISHER:** TITUS
- » **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP



» [Amiga] *Wild Streets* also received 16-bit conversions on the Amiga, PC and ST. These versions, while looking the part, were still plagued with the same gameplay issues as in the C64 port.

On paper, at least, *Wild Streets* sounds like the greatest side-scrolling action game to ever grace the Commodore 64. The game's premise follows the story of a burly vest-wearing agent on a mission to rescue his superior, Chief John Steven, from a violent gang of miscreants who have tied him to a wooden pole five stages away.

The 'wild' bit in the title comes from the fact that, as well as a handgun with a limited supply of bullets, your nameless hero is accompanied on his mission by a panther – obviously – and this ferocious and doting cat remains by his side for the duration of the game. Your feline companion will spend its time attacking anything that stands in its way, ensnaring enemies in its slavering maw and violently masticating them to bloody, pixelated messes. Well, that's how we imagine it to play out in our heads.

Like we said, on paper it sounds like Titus was on to a clear winner with *Wild Streets*, especially when you consider how popular the side-scrolling beat-'em-up genre was at the beginning of the Nineties. Indeed, in any normal circumstance it would require an act of God to make *Wild Streets* fail. Yet despite the lack of divine intervention, Titus still managed to pull off the improbable.

The best way to describe how *Wild Streets* plays in reality is to imagine that the horrendous C64 version of Irem's *Vigilante* went and impregnated a horrendous, made-up C64 version of Sega's *Shadow Dancer*, and the outcome was exactly the kind of abomination that a room full of doctors, scholars and geniuses would have predicted.

There are a number of things wrong with *Wild Streets*. Your panther sidekick, for instance, turns out to be a complete waste of time. In addition to looking out of place against the rest of the game, it's weirdly sluggish to boot. In fact, if you decide to play the game tactically – and by 'tactically' we mean hang around it – the levels take an absolute age to finish. Making matters worse, the cat, for the most part, does absolutely nothing. It just walks the streets like an oversized tabby cat, nonchalantly allowing gang members to pummel your character in the head, and never pouncing to your rescue. With this being the case, you quickly realise that it's far easier to just go the mission alone and race through the game's first half, endure the most bizarre collision detection in a videogame, shuffle through what may just be the most uninspired levels ever seen in a beat-'em-up, and battle against the most blatantly copy-and-pasted single-attack enemies of any game. The whole cat partner thing is borked.

Once you reach the end of that fifth stage, it's here that you untie the chief and the second half of banality begins. This time, however, the game transforms into a lame bodyguard simulator. We all know how much fun escort missions can be, and here you must work your way back through all the levels, ensuring that the chief makes it back alive. And yes, it's as frustrating as it sounds, having to re-endure the bizarre gameplay and shuffle through the same five levels in reverse – and no, they haven't improved since you last visited – but this time now being responsible for a computer sprite that doesn't bother to fight back. And if you somehow manage to reach the end of this mission, guess what your reward is? Only getting the chance to do the entire thing again. Dull isn't the word.



WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED

Shadow Dancer did the whole animal buddy side-scrolling beat-'em-up better, and is the game you should have been playing. Not only is it a *Shinobi* game, which gets it immediate bonus points from us, but it also featured an animal sidekick – in this instance a canine cohort called **Yamato – that proved to be far more helpful and aggressive than the soggy breadstick posing as a panther in *Wild Streets*.**

» THE POINTLESS PARTS



FELINE DULLARD

While the addition of an animal sidekick is novel, it's important that they can actually be seen to be useful. Someone tell Titus.



COLLISION WOES

Wild Streets is a contender for having the worst collision detection in any game, with or without panthers.



GUN CRIME

A gun would be a nice touch if it felt satisfying. Unfortunately, the bullets move so fast that enemies just fall to the floor.



ZUB



FOR MANY GAMERS, ZUB IS A WONDERFULLY CRAFTED 8-BIT CLASSIC THAT SKILFULLY BLENDS TOGETHER A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT GENRES. TO ITS CREATORS, THE PICKFORD BROTHERS, IT JUST FEELS LIKE UNFINISHED BUSINESS. STE PICKFORD EXPLAINS WHY

Retro Gamer: Where did the concept for *Zub* originate?

Ste Pickford: *Zub* was the first example of John's game design method. Rather than take an existing game as a template and modifying the rules a bit or changing the setting, John's technique was to start with a mood or a feeling or an emotion he wanted to convey to the player, and then conceive a game mechanic that might achieve this. He would then build a game design in that way. *Zub* was probably the first fruit of this new method. It was all based on the simple, exhilarating feeling of jumping high up into the unknown. He wanted to capture that feeling and build a game around it. That was it, really!

RG: This was also the first game that you created from the ground up, wasn't it? That must have been highly refreshing for you.

SP: Yeah, definitely. I think by that point we had some confidence that we knew what we were doing and felt capable of making a good game, if only we weren't given a crap concept to start off with. It was a nice feeling to finally get a chance to give it a go.

RG: *Zub* was your first release that saw you and John working as a team. How did that feel?

SP: I don't think we especially relished the idea of working together on the same project. We both lived at our parents' house and shared the same small bedroom, so, even though we worked at the same studio, we probably enjoyed the company of other people that we got at work. Working together all day would have just wound us both up more, I expect. Still, we both understood each other's ideas better than anyone else and could therefore rely on each other to get better results than when



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MASTERTRONIC ADDED DIMENSION
- » **DEVELOPERS:** BINARY DESIGN (JOHN PICKFORD, STE PICKFORD)
- » **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

WE ALL HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE…

STE EXPLAINS HOW a letter from an irate publisher started John on the path of creating original games.

"Like a lot of developers at the time, John started out by making games that were just clones of existing games with the details changed," begins Ste. "People would happily release rip-offs of *Pac-Man* and *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders* and *Frogger* as original games back then. John's first game was a text adventure that was pretty much a clone of an existing game he'd played, and, naively, he didn't realise there was anything wrong with doing that – after all, he'd actually coded it himself from scratch. I think getting a letter of complaint from the publisher of the original game jolted him into realising this was wrong, and from that point onwards he developed a game design technique that went back to first principles."



» [CPC] Enemy Zubs follow a different theme on each planet.

working with other people, so we probably thought we'd make a better game working together than through other people.

RG: So where did the idea for *Zub*'s Lightfarce mini-game originate?
SP: That was a combination of showing off, and frustration at the amount of good press that *Lightforce* was getting at the time, when we didn't think it was that good. The programmers at Binary Design used to show off to each other and bring in demos of stuff they'd written in the evenings. The twisting/warping Quicksilva logos at the start of *Deathwake*/*Glider Rider*/*Max Headroom* were examples of show-off stuff John had written in the evenings to impress the other guys at Binary Design, which then got shoved into the game.

There was a running gag at the studio that the programmers should each try to write a game in a day. A single day, like a sort of macho programmers thing. There were loads of ideas knocking about, but John was the only one to actually do it, and the result was Lightfarce. I think it actually took about a day and a half in the end. Plus about a day for me to draw the sprites, so 2.5 man days, but we just about thought it counted as a game-in-a-day. It was done towards the end of *Zub*, making the project an extra day and a half late [laughs], and as it was unreleasable, we just stuck it in *Zub* as an Easter egg.



» [Spectrum] Ste on the Zub character: "I remember John wanted him weedy and spindly, and him doing a sort of Gollum-like crouching motion in front of me, to get across how he wanted him to look before he jumped."

> **"Zub was all based on the simple, exhilarating feeling of jumping high up into the unknown"**

RG: So how long did *Zub* take to create and what problems did you encounter?
SP: Hmm. My memory may well fail me here. I know the game was late, by a few weeks. I *think* it was a 12-week project, and it took us 16 weeks. Perhaps even 16 to 20 weeks. So by modern standards incredibly fast, and only a month late at most, but in percentage terms something like 25 to 30 per cent over deadline, which is quite a chunk. The main problem was just finishing the game in time, to the standard we wanted, which we weren't able to do.

RG: So what did you do?
SP: The big problem we had is something I couldn't have explained at the time, but looking back I can explain in today's terms. We were trying to 'iterate' and, much like today, the scheduling of development at the studio didn't allow for that. John thought, quite rightly, that the most important thing to get right was the feel of the main character, and his jump, so he spent a lot of time on this. The scheduling system we used back then demanded that the programmer break down each programming task and assign it a time. Main character horizontal movement might be a couple of hours – yes, we scheduled that tightly! – and maybe a couple more hours for making the character jump. These were 'known problems', as other games had been written with sprites that moved horizontally, and user-controlled jumps, so it wasn't considered reasonable to take more than a couple of hours to program each of these things.

RG: That's an interesting approach…
SP: Yes, it sounds odd, but John was quite unusual at Binary Design in that he actually played the game he was writing quite a lot. He might spend half the day programming, and the other half playing the game, essentially doing his own QA and focus testing – we didn't have QA back then. The time he spent playing the game instead of programming more features was considered to be time he was wasting by the management.

What actually happened with *Zub* was that John probably spent a full day making the character move and jump initially, writing it and playing with it and tweaking it, and already he'd be behind schedule. Then, the next day he'd play with it for a few hours and get a feel for it, and start further tweaking the variables for movement speed, animation speed, jump height, gravity, etc, until it felt better. I'd look at it with him, and we'd play it together for a bit, and maybe we'd decide to draw an extra frame of animation, or probably at that point we came up with the idea of Zub





» Here's a look at Zub's frames of animation. It took the brothers a long time to accomplish, but the result was definitely worth it.





» Ste was horrified when he saw the final box art for *Zub*. He had drawn his own cover, but it was never considered. We know which one we prefer.

switching which hand holds his gun when he turned around, so I'd go back and spend half a day working on the animation again. We wanted it to feel right, and we kept going until we were happy.

RG: So it was quite a meticulous process. That's how you went over deadline, right?

SP: Exactly, as there was no time allocated for any of this in the schedule. Two hours for movement and two hours for jump would have been all that was allowed, and my time as an artist drawing the sprites had already been allocated days before. Two or three days with the two of us tweaking work we'd already done was considered an irresponsible waste of time. We instinctively knew that we couldn't make a good game without doing this work, but we had no way of convincing the boss that this was anything other than time wasted. We did a lot of this kind of redoing of work and tweaking in our own time in the evenings, but we inevitably did some of it during regular hours, so we were constantly under pressure during the development for being late.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

FEUD (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1987

PLOK!
SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR: 1992

NAKED WAR
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2004

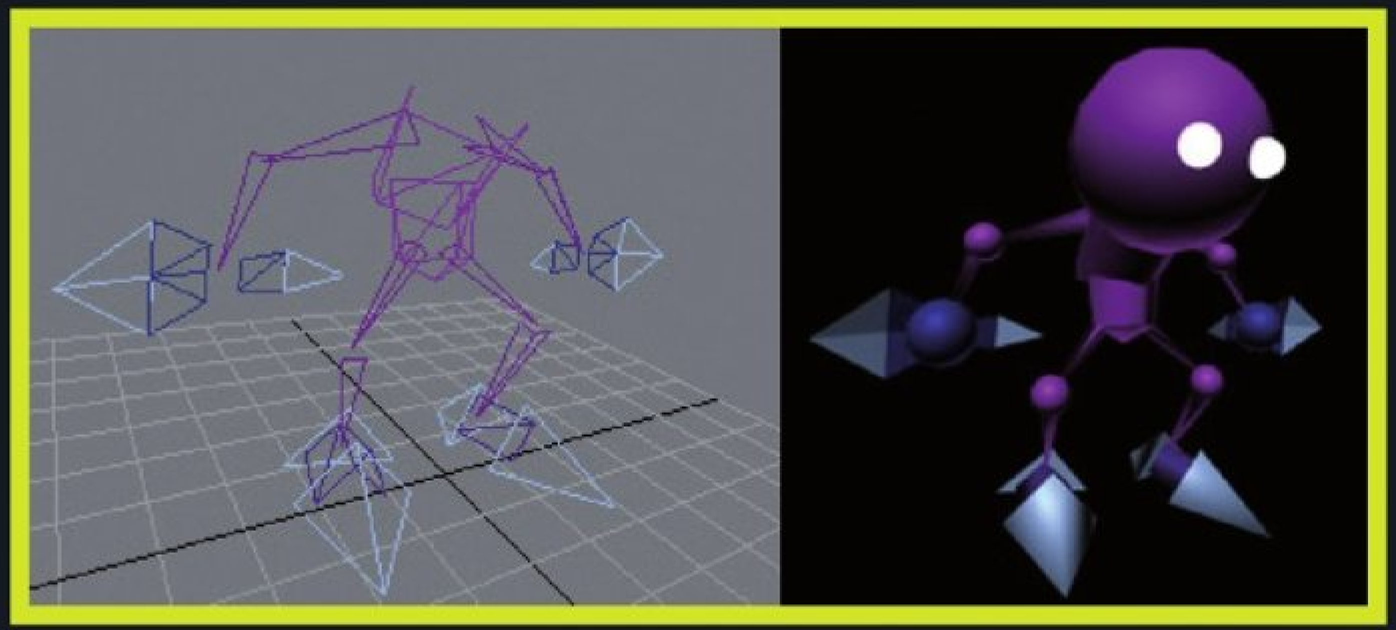
FIGHT, FIGHT, FIGHT

PLAYGROUND WARS USED to be all the rage when we were at school, so we were quite interested to find out which version Ste felt was the definitive one. "I'd have to say the Spectrum version, as it ran faster than the Amstrad version, as I recall. The extra colours made the Amstrad version look a bit gaudy, and the Spectrum-style graphics didn't really suit the C64, I don't think."

So there you go. If you want to revisit Ste and John's game, the ZX Spectrum version is definitely the one to opt for.

"We were constantly under pressure for being late"

» Zub was resurrected for a short time as an internal tech demo for Zed Two. The final creation consisted of just 110 triangles and was intended for a game called *Zed Space*.







RG: That must have been really frustrating for you.

SP: It just felt like nobody but the two of us actually wanted to make the game any good, and we had to face getting into trouble on a daily basis in order to make the game good. We were trying to make something of the quality of a coin-op, in terms of game design and balance, and we were nowhere near in the end. We had to drop a whole extra layer of features we had planned – a system of bonus items and power-ups that would have really rounded the game off – because we'd already missed the original deadline. As far as we were concerned, the game was disappointingly released in an unfinished state, but as far as the boss and the publisher were concerned, the game was over deadline and over budget.

RG: So there was plenty of pressure from Mastertronic, then?

SP: Only pressure to get the thing out and in the shops. They never really had much involvement in the content, as I recall. That was one good thing about those days: the publisher was mainly focused on sales, marketing and publishing, and they didn't try to influence the content the developer was creating so much as they do these days.

RG: Were there ever plans for a sequel?

SP: Not particularly. I don't think we really thought in terms of sequels back then. We didn't really think in terms of characters or IP. We thought in terms of game mechanics. *Zub* was borne from a game mechanic idea and a character and scenario were constructed to facilitate that game mechanic. For the next game, John would have a different idea, so we'd come up with a different scenario to best express it. It's only years later that a fondness for the old characters we came up with makes sequels seem like a good idea.

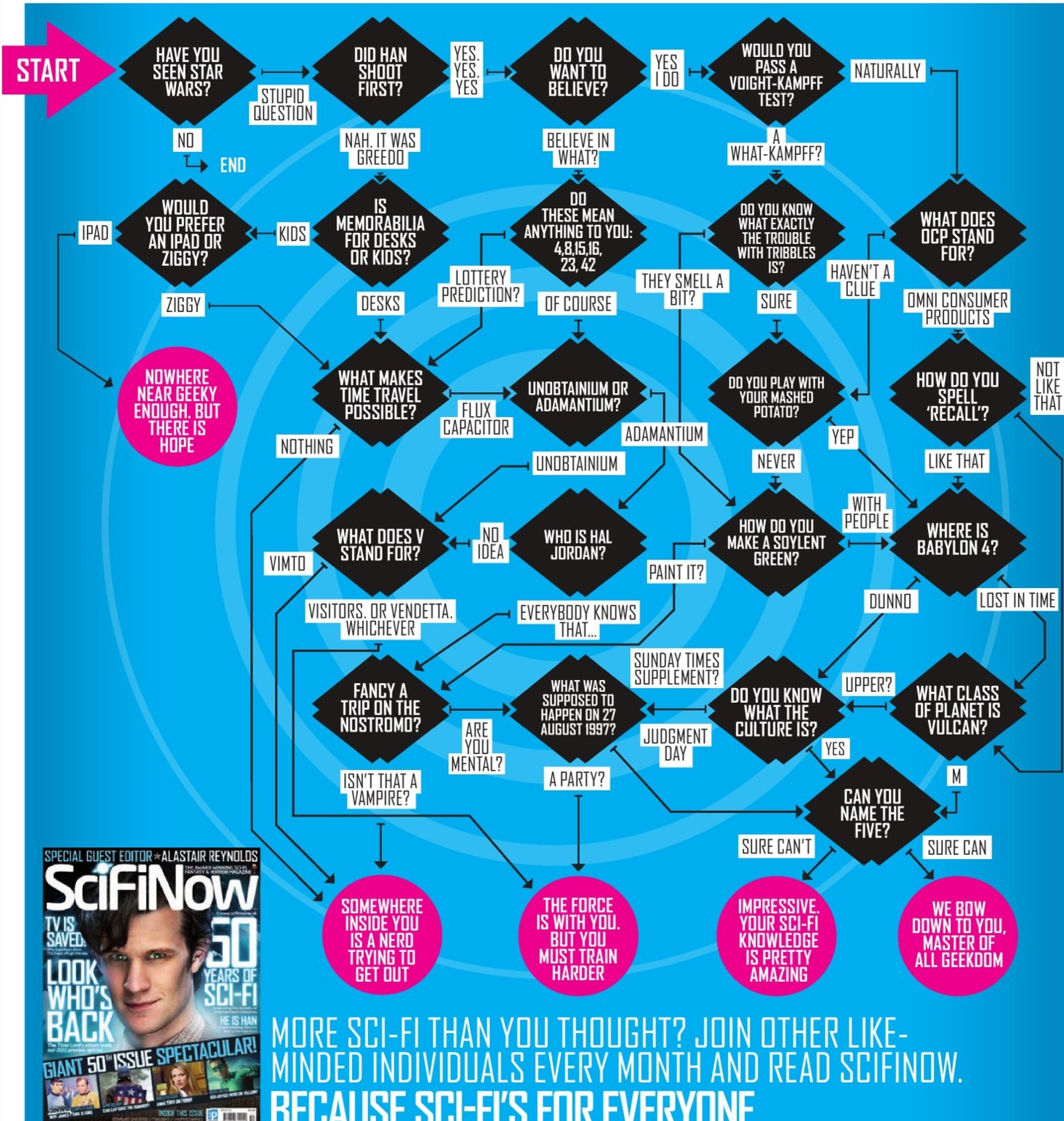
RG: Why do you think people still have fond memories of *Zub*?

SP: No idea! I've always been a bit disappointed with it myself, thinking it was only an 'almost good' game. If only we'd had a couple more weeks it would have maybe turned into a game deserving of such fond memories.

Special thanks to Ste Pickford for his time and the archive imagery he gave us. Be sure to visit **www.zee-3.com/pickfordbros/** for more information about *Zub* and other great games.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

MIKRO-GEN

It was the company that produced the acclaimed Wally series, but the team were certainly no fools. David Crookes looks at the four men who formed the heart of one of the best-loved 8-bit software houses of all time

Programmers, eh? A boring lot whose eyes are filled with the reflection of code from a badly lit screen, doing nothing more exciting than reaching out for cold, festering pizza washed down with cola. Or so the myth goes. It certainly wasn't like that at Mikro-Gen. "Some days no coding would be done at all," confesses programmer Chris Hinsley. "There were times when we decided the day was going to be spent trying to beat the bendy bar record based around some exercise equipment Raf had brought in. Occasionally someone might put in a line of code."

Quite how the core Mikro-Gen programmers – Hinsley, Raffaele Cecco, David Perry and Nick Jones – managed to produce top-rated games such as the *Wally* series is anyone's guess under such circumstances. But they did. "Raf used to rub his feet on the office static carpet and zap Nick's ears all the time," Hinsley adds.

And what was the management doing while this madness was taking place at the office in Middlesex? Nothing. The programmers were left to get on with whatever they wanted. "I don't think I'd describe it as a university atmosphere, more a raving frat house like in *Animal House*," laughs Hinsley, who was taken on at the company by its managing director, Mike Meek. "There was the time I placed a life-sized poster of Linda Lusardi on the back of the gents' toilet door. That was there for weeks until Mike's wife got to hear about it. Thing is, we actually got stuff done, really good stuff too, in that atmosphere. Sometimes we would all be there for 56 hours, no sleep, crunch coding to hit deadlines, slapping each other awake. You wouldn't be allowed to treat employees like this, but we did it to ourselves."

Mikro-Gen was formed in 1981 by Meek and Andy Laurie. One of the earliest developments was *Chess*, which was published by Sinclair Research. But very soon Mikro-Gen became a publisher itself. Most of the early releases were either based on well-known concepts or otherwise derived from coin-op games that were popular at the time. For example, Stephen Townsend's *Creepy Crawler* was a version of Atari's *Centipede*.

It also published text adventure games – Saturn Developments' *Mad Martha* came out in 1983 and included a few arcade sections – and it created simulations. And yet while these sold well, they didn't set the gaming world alight. At the time, the company was tiny and yet it was ambitious. The bosses identified a strong need for a major injection of talent and so it was always on the lookout for new blood.

One of the ways in which it tried to secure talent was by going to the many computer fairs that were dedicated to specific machines in the 1980s. In August 1983, Mikro-Gen appeared at the ZX Microfair in London's Alexandra Palace and it had a stand very close to a small mail order company called Crash Micro Games Action. The two companies soon began to talk and the conversation ended with Mikro-Gen handing over a copy of *Mad Martha* and being delighted at being given

INSTANT EXPERT

Hinsley honed his early career during lunch breaks at school – either by playing arcades or, later, by joining a programming club.

Hinsley was the first coder to be employed by Mikro-Gen. He lived with technical director Andrew Laurie for a spell. Perry, Jones and Cecco joined later.

Mikro-Gen's first big hit was *Automania*, which introduced Wally Week. *Pyjamarama* was the sequel and gamers took Wally to their hearts.

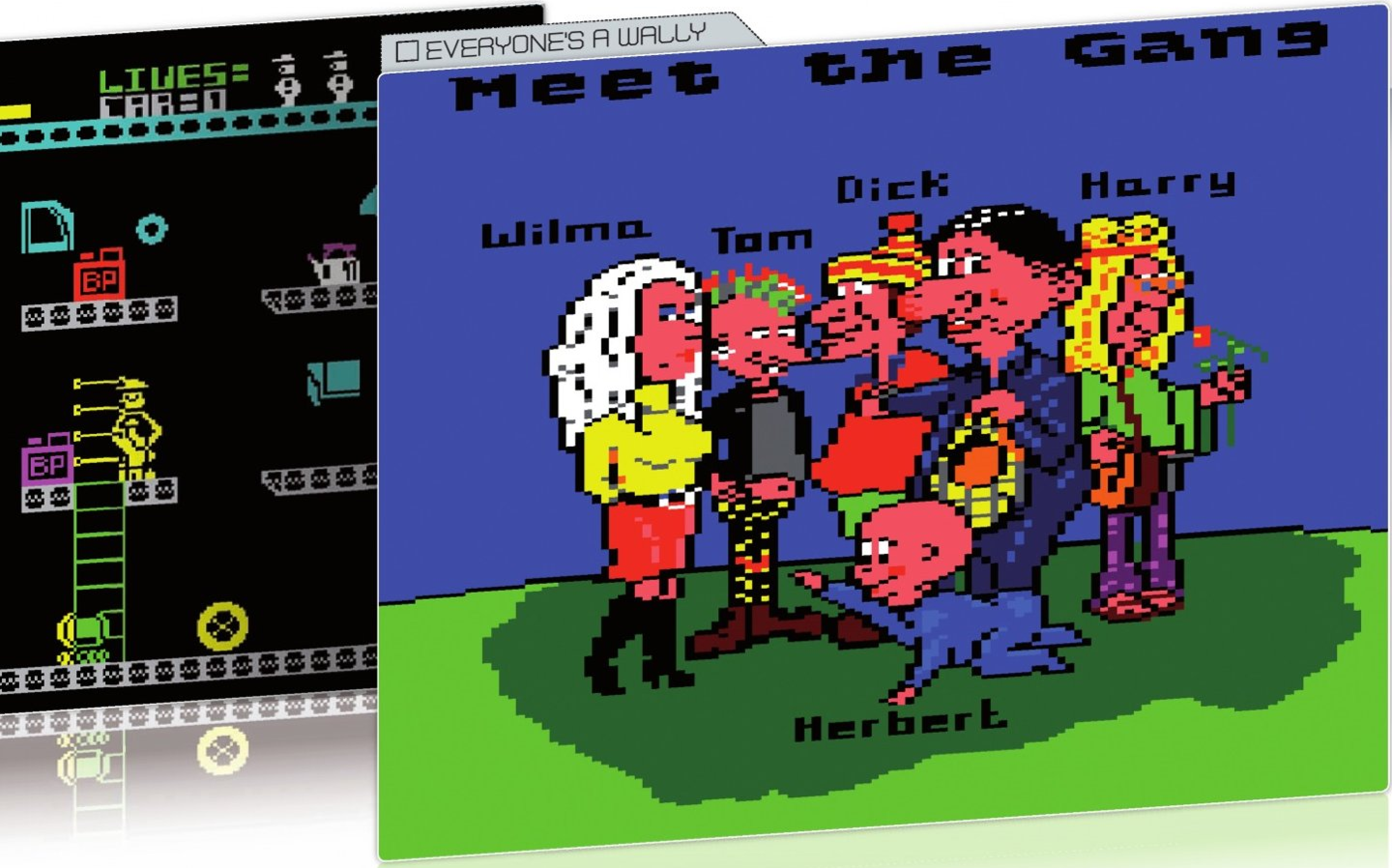
Paul Denial was the man who visualised Wally Week. He also drew the company's adverts.

***C&VG* wanted to** print a map of *Pyjamarama* and said they would draw their own if Mikro-Gen didn't supply one. David Perry told them their map would be wrong. The mag decided not to proceed.

Mikro-Gen was split over two centres: one in Ashford, Middlesex, where the coders got down to work, and one in Bracknell for the marketing team.

The pop single on the B-side of *Everyone's A Wally* was part of a plan to expand Week into other media.

Mikro-Gen became one of the most important Spectrum software houses but an ill-fated foray with the Mikro-Plus add-on was costly.



> **“Show us your stuff. Now we all take the piss and if you can take it, you're in”**
>
> CHRIS HINSLEY ON THE INTERVIEW PROCESS AT MIKRO-GEN



a good review. Little did anyone know that six months later, Crash Micro Games Action would become *Crash* magazine and the two companies continued the relationship it had built up. This ultimately helped Mikro-Gen to become known to programmers and gamers, which helped as the bosses tried to secure a winning team.

Fledgling years

But before we continue with that story, let's rewind and look at how the four key programmers began to make a name for themselves. We start with Hinsley who, like so many at that time, had become fascinated by games at a very early age. He would spend his dinner money at a cafe across the road from school, but none of his mum's cash was spent on food. He would pump his 10p pieces into the arcade games and then, when the ZX81 was launched, he used pester power to ensure his mum snapped one up. Rather than start playing others' games, he set about trying to re-create those coin-ops using little more than BASIC and a kilobyte of RAM.

"I quickly realised that it was going to be impossible, so I managed to convince my mum to part with more cash to get a 16KB RAM pack," he recalls. "That helped as far as memory space was concerned, but BASIC was proving way too slow to do anything like I wanted. Try doing a sideways scroll on a ZX81 in BASIC for a *Scramble* rip-off. Forget it. So I started to look into this 'machine code' stuff I'd heard about, with all its strange words listed in the back pages of the ZX81 manual. I had no clue what was going on. I was so dumb I thought that each instruction did quite high-level things, I remember thinking that the 'djnz' instruction did something like display the screen for a frame or something. The Sinclair manual for the ZX81 just had a few pages at the back that listed the opcodes but didn't say anything about what they did."

At around the same time, the other programmers that were set to make up Mikro-Gen were also furiously trying to learn how to code. Cecco was playing around with computers and creating demos and Jones dabbled with programming on a ZX81. He wrote his first machine code videogame, *Galaliens*, on an ORIC-1, doing everything including graphics, programming, sound effects and tape mastering. It was based on the arcade game *MoonAlien* that was itself a clone of *Galaxians* and it took 15 months to write. He sent it to a company called Tansoft, which offered him a choice of £250 cash or £400 worth of equipment. Jones didn't receive anything in the end – the company went bankrupt before any kind of payment came through.

Irish-born Perry was also a schoolboy coder but he harboured ambitions to become a test pilot. That soon fell by the wayside after he sent some of his programs to Interface Publications, which printed them in magazines and books, one of which was called *Astounding Arcade Games* and sold 13,000 copies. "In those days, you had ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

4 Number of core programmers: Chris Hinsley, Raffaele Cecco, David Perry and Nick Jones.

3,500 The amount in dollars David Perry said his Mikro-Gen salary was equivalent to.

15 Number of months it took for Nick Jones to write the code for *Galaliens*.

30 Number of seconds Jones said it took *Galaliens* to crash when he showed it to Mikro-Gen.

5 Number of Mikro-Gen games based around *Wally Week* and his crew.

50 Mike Meek said Mikro-Plus would allow Mikro-Gen to produce games that were 50 per cent larger than usual.

130,000 Amount in pounds Mikro-Gen invested in Mikro-Plus.

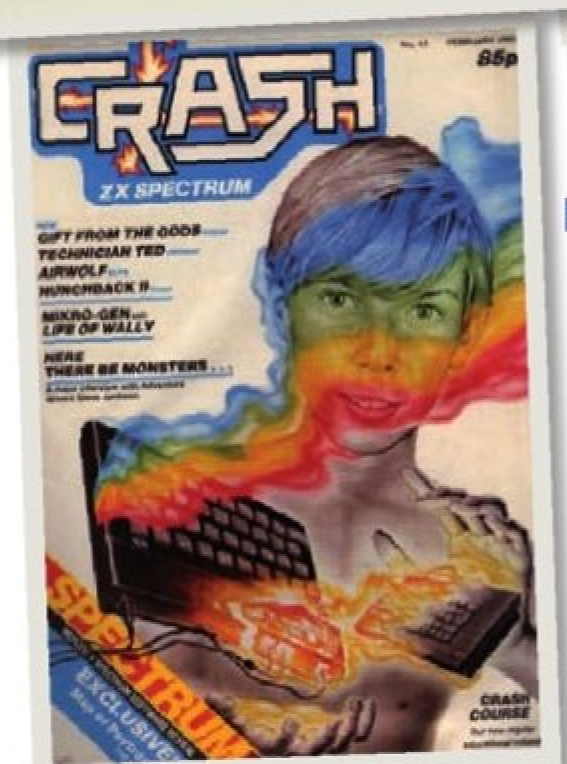
11,000 Number of sales of *Shadow Of The Unicorn*, which helped lead to Mikro-Gen's collapse.



» Mikro-Gen was a prolific publisher and not afraid of being inspired by other licenses: take a look at *Pat The Postman*!



» Clockwise from left: David Shea, Andrew Laurie, David Perry (with big hair), Mike Meek and Chris Hinsley.



STAR RATINGS

Mikro-Gen marketing director Paul Denial shed some light on the working practices at the firm when he and company founder Mike Meek were interviewed by *Crash* magazine way back in the February 1985 issue.

He said the company worked in a similar way to a film unit in that the games were produced as a team effort. "We don't really believe in making a star, it's not the way a software house should work," he told editor Roger Kean, adding: "We do look on it like being a film."

to actually type the entire game in from a book – without mistakes," he said. "Hours later, you finally got to play, or start looking for your mistakes! This looking at program code and fixing mistakes was a great way to gently learn programming." Perry then sent one of his games, *Drakmaze*, to Mikro-Gen and it was accepted.

Getting together

With Hinsley having honed his programming skills on a Commodore Pet during school lunchtimes, he was starting to become more au fait with the 6502 codes that the Commodore CPU used. Those lunchtimes were crucial for him, and he recalls the penny dropping when he figured what registers and instructions were all about. His first ever machine code program on the Pet drew lines using the block graphics character, but he decided to go back to the Z80 on the ZX81 to write small subroutines.

Before long he had coded a clutch of commercial games for the Spectrum, which included *Laserwarp*, *Paradroid*, *Scramble*, *Centipede* and *Missile Command*. "This is when I first had contact with Mikro-Gen," says Hinsley. "I bumped into a chap called Paul Denial who was a sales rep for the firm and he was desperate for content because all they had at the time was *Mad Martha* and some other fairly sucky titles like *Chess*. He offered me fame and fortune even though I had yet to finish my O-Levels and the company took all of my games."

> **"There could be some friction – I remember David and Nick rolling around having punch-ups occasionally"** RAFFAELE CECCO ON HIS EARLY WORKING LIFE

Very soon Hinsley began to drive around in fast cars and he bought his clothes from the very best tailors in the land… or so he wishes. "Guess what?" he asks. "I didn't get rich out of this." And so on to college he went, bagging himself a place at university, but after the first term he was offered a full time job at Mikro-Gen. He wasn't sure what to do.

"Most of my mates on the computer course said I should take the job as it was a solid offer and there was no guarantee of a job at the end of the course," he recalls. "So I quit to join Mikro-Gen and I was the first hire they had done. At that point Mikro-Gen was Mike Meek the MD, Andy Laurie the Technical Director and me, and I lived with Andy for the first few months while finding a place for myself."

Hinsley was introduced to new tools such as an Editor and an Assembler and he felt his creativity being unleashed. He converted his *Laserwarp* code into assembler and it formed the code base for *Automania*. And, in doing so, Wally Week was born. It was the start of a really successful period for Mikro-Gen.

The character was visualised by Denial, and Meek would go on to say that Wally was "one of the few humanised computer characters out there." Indeed, Week was an average worker who toiled on a car assembly line, and the idea with *Automania* was that you helped him build a series of cars. His work wasn't easy, as bouncing tyres and robots that lurked around the factory killed the little fella. Couple these with falling ceiling fans and you had a situation that today would be outlawed under health and safety laws.

"We wanted to create a character that could be used in several games," says Hinsley. "Having a mechanic building cars in *Automania* was pretty much my idea but I don't claim it was anything great by later *Wally* game standards. It was a very basic collect and return game. It was quite nice to see the cars take shape as you placed pieces on the build ramp, but I don't think anybody thought this was a major event in game design."

It was Hinsley's first time using professional development tools. All his previous efforts while at school and uni were put together with hand-coded pokes into memory and a listing of Z80 opcodes from the back of the Spectrum manual. "This was the first time I had an on-screen editor – I used Wordstar – and an assembler," he adds. "It was quite a change from manually listing out and poking in opcodes."

The new tools allowed Hinsley to put much more into the game designs because the grunt work of just getting the code into the machine was automated. The company continued to improve its tools, creating sprite editors and download programs where it could transmit the game down to the Spectrum via a parallel port build on the back of the machine. "Andy was very good with that type of hardware tinkering," recalls Hinsley, "and he





» [Spectrum] A good-looking loading screen kind of jarred with what was to come in *Battle Of The Planets*.

TIMELINE

1982 MIKRO-GEN IS FORMED BY MIKE MEEK AND ANDY LAURIE. IT WORKS ON *STAR TREK* AND *CHESS*.

1983 THE PEOPLE BEHIND WHAT BECAME *CRASH MAGAZINE* MEET THE MIKRO-GEN TEAM AND REVIEW *MAD MARTHA*.

1983 *LASERWARP*, A GAME SUBMITTED TO MIKRO-GEN BY CHRIS HINSLEY BEFORE HE IS EMPLOYED AT THE COMPANY, GETS 77 PER CENT IN *CRASH*.

1984 DAVID PERRY SENDS *DRAKMAZE* TO MIKRO-GEN. HINSLEY JOINS THE FIRM.

1984 *AUTOMANIA* IS RELEASED AND INTRODUCES WALLY WEEK.

1984 *PYJAMARAMA* IS THE SUCCESSFUL FOLLOW-UP. PERRY CONVERTS THE GAME TO THE AMSTRAD CPC, HAVING JOINED FOLLOWING AN ENCOUNTER WITH MEEK IN LONDON.

1985 NICK JONES STARTS AT MIKRO-GEN HAVING BEEN AMAZED BY *PYJAMARAMA*. *EVERYONE'S A WALLY* IS LAUNCHED. CECCO SENDS A PROGRAMMING DEMO TO MIKRO-GEN AND GETS A JOB.

1985 MIKRO-GEN RELEASES *HERBERT'S DUMMY RUN*, *THREE WEEKS IN PARADISE* AND *SHADOW OF THE UNICORN*, THE LATTER FOR THE ILL-FATED MIKRO-PLUS.

1986 WITH ANDY LAURIE HAVING LEFT DUE TO THE MIKRO-PLUS FAILURE, CECCO IS EXCITED TO SEE *EQUINOX* RELEASED.

1986 PERRY WORKS ON *STAINLESS STEEL* BUT HATES THE TOP-DOWN VIEW. THE TEAM START TO LEAVE ONE BY ONE.

kept improving that side of the tools. The tools allowed us to start to build a library of game functions and so each game could build on the code base of the previous game and be extended."

Moving on and up

The next game in the *Wally* series was *Pyjamarama*. Following the disappointment of *Drakmaze* Perry had forgotten about Mikro-Gen, but on a trip to London he met Meek at a computer show. The success of *Automania* had given Meek fresh incentive to set up a programming team and he was happy to chat with Perry, whose game had impressed him. Meek offered Perry a job, and while friends and family advised him to turn the opportunity down – taking it would have meant abandoning his education – he decided to go ahead and he moved to Virginia Water, near Bracknell.

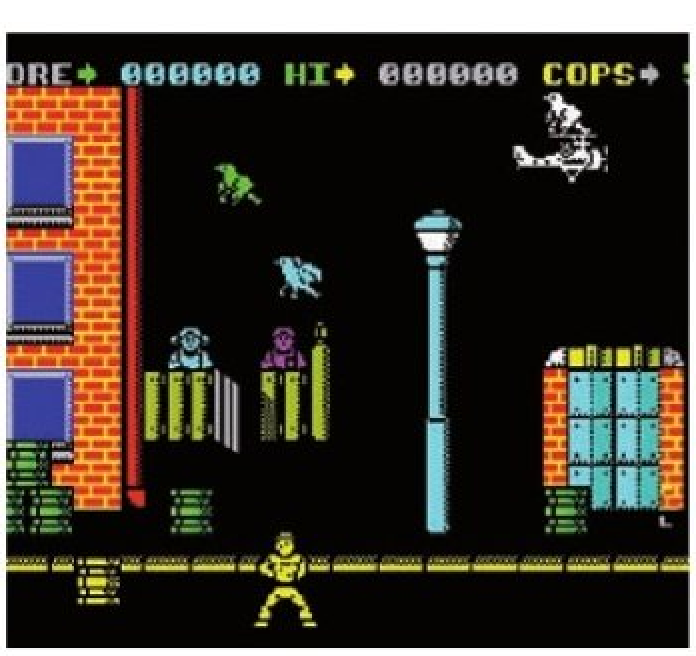
The salary was poor – it was the days before the minimum wage was introduced – and Perry says it was the equivalent of $3,500 a year plus a company car that was, in reality, a beaten-up van that was shared by the entire team ("It was a clapped-out blue death trap of a van that spewed exhaust fumes into the back so we all got dizzy and reeked of petrol, although it gave us an excuse to act like 'van people'," laughs Cecco at the memory). "Yet I worked in a room of talented people," Perry says. "I came in with a very fixed way of programming and I was taught how to use certain tricks in order to make a great game."

Perry's first job after writing a test program was to convert *Pyjamarama* for the Amstrad CPC. "I was given some amazing source code," he says. "What I basically realised was just how much catching up I needed to do, but it was like looking at DNA and I felt privileged to work with it. I really let it soak in." The conversion went down extremely well. *Amstrad Action* awarded it 79 per cent and praised it for having "good animation" and an "excellent combination of arcade action and true adventuring." Perry also had his moment of glory when Hinsley was unable to make the media launch due to illness. The press interviewed Perry instead.

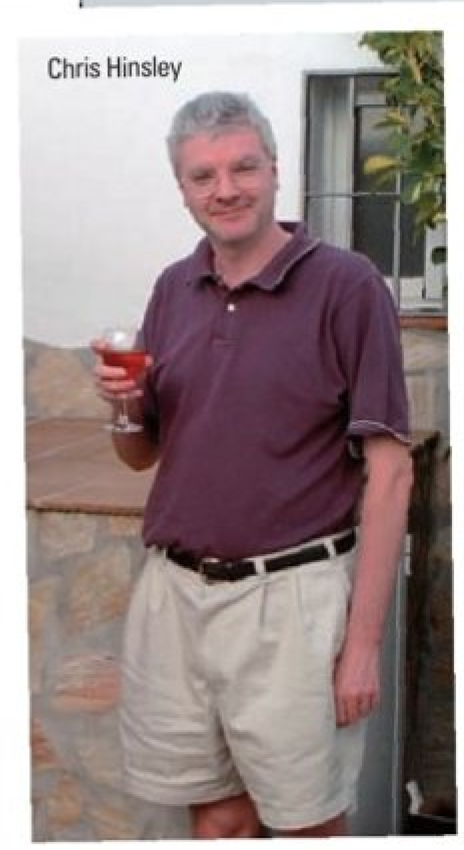
"Dave was fresh out of school and raring to go," remembers Hinsley. "The interview technique seemed to be, 'Okay, show us your stuff. Right – now we all take the piss and if you can take it, you're in'. You needed thick skin to survive with us. The working environment was truly awesome. We all had our own particular project, but we always helped each other out with suggestions, bits of graphics or code routines. Certainly the code base to *Pyjamarama* was used in plenty of following projects, not just the *Wally* games."

Jones had bagged a job at Mikro-Gen shortly after he had finished *Galaliens*. He spotted a job advertisement in *Your Computer* magazine showing vacancies at Mikro-Gen. He had been blown away by *Pyjamarama* so he sent them a copy of *Galaliens*. "I sent my game to them, but it crashed every time," he said. "By sheer chance, I had a really old version on the other side of the cassette. They loaded it and the game ran for about 30 seconds before crashing. They liked what they saw though and offered me a full-time job."

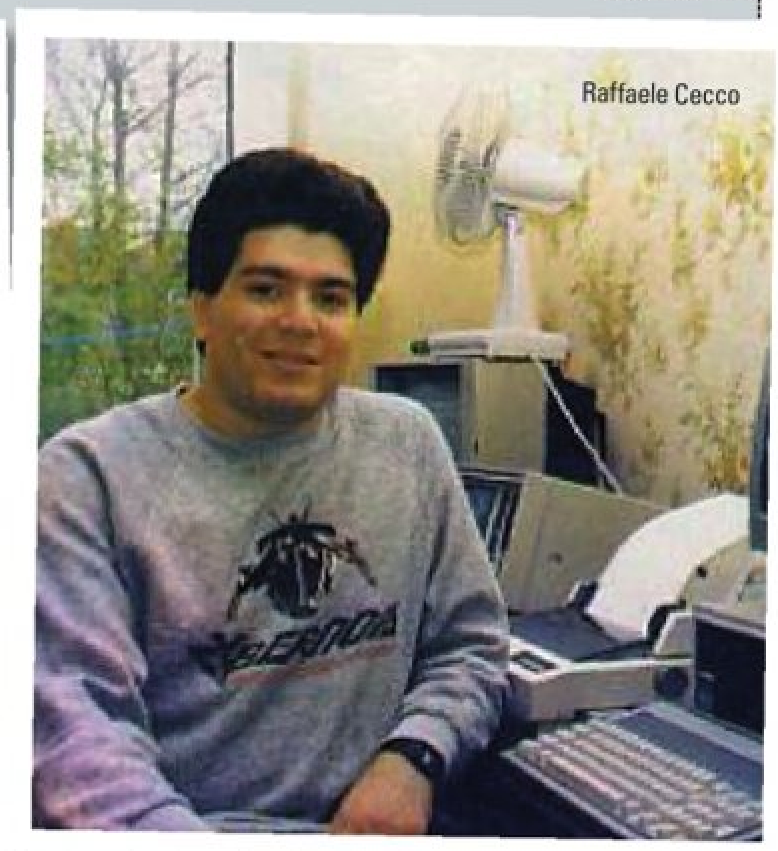
Pyjamarama was a key turning point for the company. There was a feeling at Mikro-Gen that arcade games either had the player blowing things up or collecting items. The team wanted to see a true adventure game with arcade-style presentation, making the objects you collect do more than just earn points and make them important to the progress through the game. One of the limitations was having *Wally* hold two items at once and this was because there was only room on the panel to show two items. Yet this helped to create the gameplay because, while



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Chris Hinsley



Raffaele Cecco

Chris Hinsley After programming games published by Rainbird, Probe Software and Hewson, Chris moved into OS design and went on to form the software development company Tao Group in 1992. He is currently technology director of Antix Labs, based in Reading. The company produces middleware to enable the same game binaries to run on different gaming platforms and phones and it has a store at **antixgames.com**.

David Perry David moved to America in 1991 to work for Virgin Games and he developed titles such as *Aladdin* and 7-UP's *Cool Spot*. He went on to form Shiny Entertainment in 1993, working on *Earthworm Jim*, before selling the firm to Atari in 2006. He formed **GameConsultants.com** in 2006. He is currently head of game streaming company Gaikai.



David Perry

Raffaele Cecco Although he started his career at Mikro-Gen, Raffaele's most famous work arguably came while working for Hewson Consultants. *Cybernoid*, *Stormlord* and *Deliverance* were highly acclaimed. He is no longer in the games industry although he still programs commercial web applications and he is writing a programming book. He is thinking about developing games for mobile platforms, however.

Nick Jones Nick worked closely with Cecco after leaving Mikro-Gen and perfected bitmap hi-res scroll on the C64 with *Stormlord* and *Deliverance*. He also went on to work with Perry on games that included *Earthworm Jim*. He is now the lead programmer at Visual Concepts Entertainment in San Francisco.

SIX OF THE BEST



Automania (1984)
As the game that introduced gamers to *Wally Week*, *Automania* is a rather important title. Its bold, chunky and detailed graphics prove to be something of a draw, but it's the tricky timing of the jumps that make it a game of real skill.



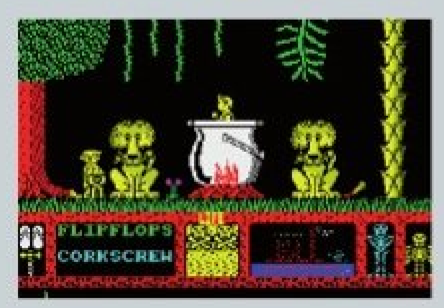
Pyjamarama (1984)
There is something of a theme with this six of the best, and for good reason – the *Wally* games were fantastic. *Pyjamarama* was Wally's second outing and Hinsley wanted it to be an arcade adventure. He also had a desire to outdo Ultimate.



Everyone's A Wally (1985)
Second sequels can be tough, but with Wally's third game new characters were introduced. There are five in all and each have a specific task to do. Players can take control of each of them and it makes for some absorbing play.



Herbert's Dummy Run (1985)
It's yet another *Wally* game, only with Herbert, the Week family member with a knack of being useless. You have four-and-a-half hours to get Herbert back to his parents, using a spot of lateral thinking. You also need some good reactions.



Three Weeks In Paradise (1985)
With a title playing on the family name, you can guess where this is set. But Wally's jaunt doesn't work out as expected when Wilma and Herbert are kidnapped. By collecting items, our hero gets to rescue the stricken pair.



Equinox (1986)
By the time this came out, *Battle Of The Planets* had been released. So players were praying that this redeemed the developer. It did. It's a colourful, difficult shoot-'em-up with a convoluted story that showed the future potential of Cecco.

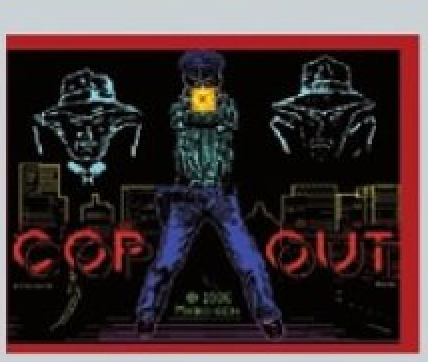
THREE TO AVOID



Battle Of The Planets (1986)
Quite why this game was so well-rated at the time of its release is baffling when this license of a television series is so repetitive. The graphics are great but the controls are confusing and it takes a lot of patience. It's shoot, planet hop, shoot, planet hop and you soon tire of it.



Shadow Of The Unicorn (1985)
This Tolkien-esque game was set to be a major release for Mikro-Gen, making its debut alongside the Mikro-Plus and coming with a book. It was confusing, the graphics were awful and it's little wonder it bombed so dramatically, shifting nowhere near the volume it should have.



Cop-Out (1986)
Play it today and you'll wonder what the attraction is of a game in which you simply go left and right and shoot. It was released in 1986 and seemed quite retrograde even then, although Mikro-Gen was confident enough of it to use it in the National Computer Games Championship.

the player only needed two things to put together, gamers had to devise a route and plan ahead.

"Like a good book, there were several threads of the adventure you could pick up and follow, but eventually they join up to make the whole," Hinsley says. "All the objects are needed for some reason somewhere. *Pyjamarama* really set the industry benchmark for what an arcade game could be." Soon after Jones joined Mikro-Gen, Cecco was signed up. Hinsley, Perry, Jones and Cecco became the core team. "While others came and went, the four set the pace and created the craziness of the office," says Hinsley.

Cecco got his job at Mikro-Gen after sending it a programming demo. He also sent it to Dalali Software, but it was Mikro-Gen who offered him a job. At first he had nothing specific to do other than experiment and learn the ropes. Meanwhile, the team was producing a *Pyjamarama* sequel called *Everyone's A Wally*.

"The obvious thing to do to expand on the gameplay of *Pyjamarama* was to have multiple characters… at least it seemed obvious to me at the time," explains Hinsley. "Each character would have a particular 'skill' that certain objects could only be used to solve puzzle elements by one team member. Each character could carry two items, and they would wander around and swap items when you were not in direct control of them. That could have made the game frustrating, but I think we managed to pull it off without causing players to give up on the game. Certainly *EAW* pushed things quite far down the adventure side rather than the arcade side."

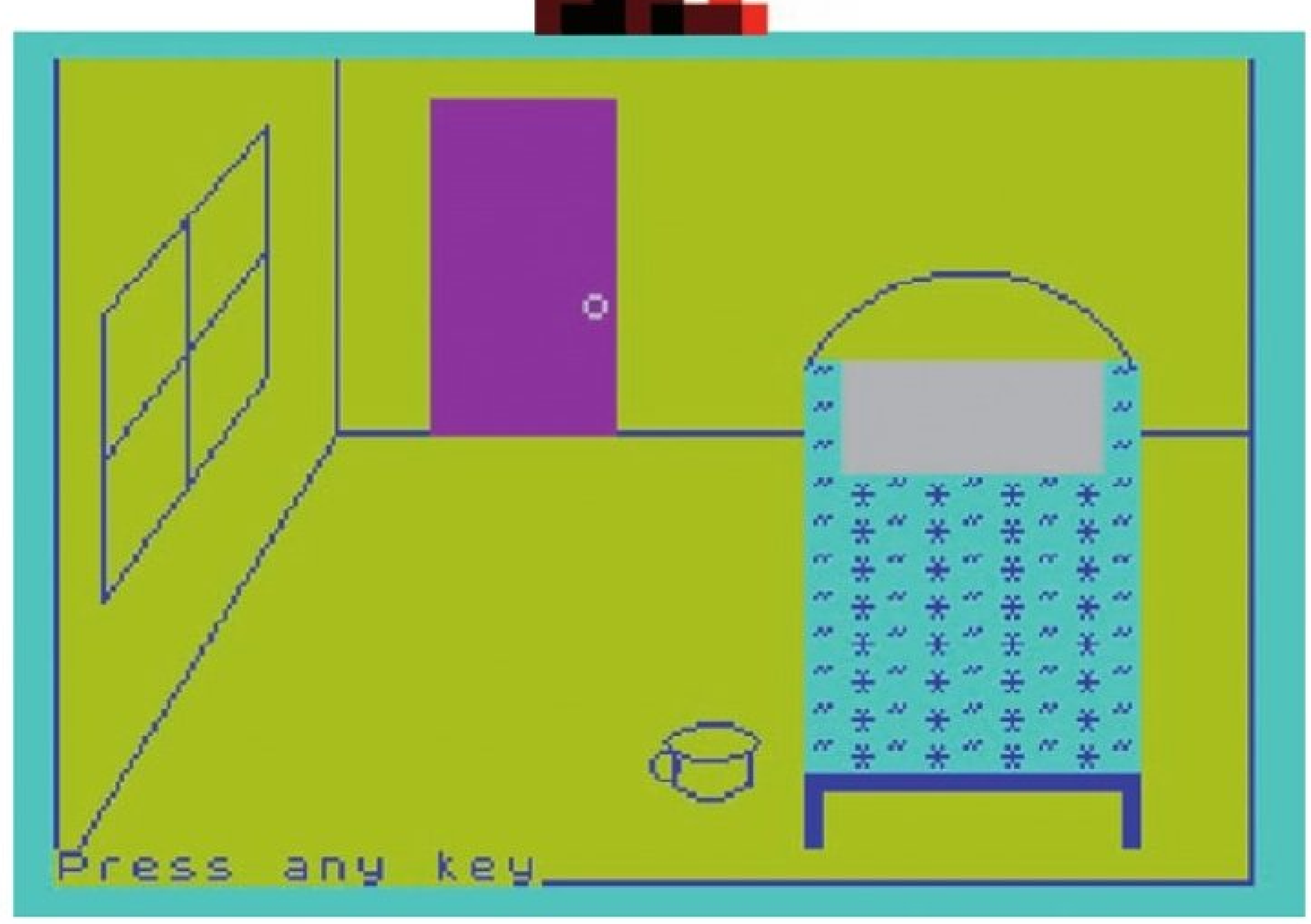
Mikro-Gen was maturing and the influx of money from *Pyjamarama* was changing the company. New offices were planned and it was the start of another era for the firm.

Other games were also released including *Herbert's Dummy Run*, *Battle Of The Planets* and *Three Weeks In Paradise*, the final *Wally Week* game. Herbert was a quick re-spin of the *Pyjamarama* source code and it concentrated on another member of the Week family. The player had to guide Herbert back to his parents and the style and presentation was not massively dissimilar to *Everyone's A Wally*. *Crash* loved it and gave it 90 per cent. "It was Dave's introduction to the *Wally* games," says Hinsley. "We also wanted to do something a bit lighter than *EAW* as some reviews did think *EAW* had gone too far to the adventure side, so both *Herbert* and *Three Weeks* were going to be much more 'fun' and less 'thinky'."

But this era also heralded another new start. Cecco started his first game, *Equinox*. And boy was it good. "My approach was to learn as much as possible from the other guys working there, especially Chris," Cecco recalls. "They were all more experienced than me as I'd never actually programmed an entire game before. One of the biggest challenges was getting my head around gameplay – locks, keys, maps and all that sort of thing. It was really exciting seeing my first game finished and on the shelves and in magazines."

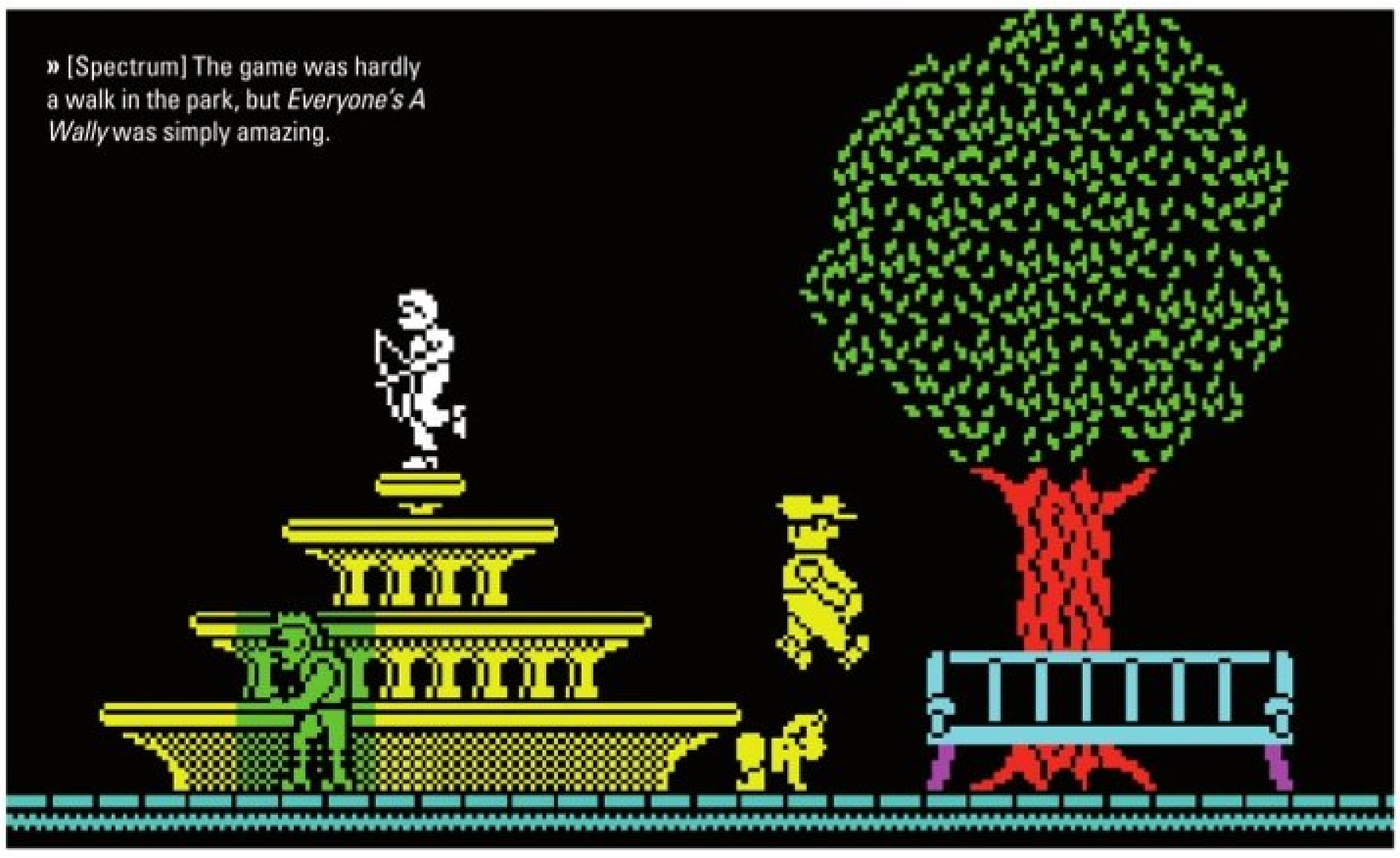
Equinox reviewed well with *Crash* contrasting it favourably with another Mikro-Gen game, *Battle Of The Planets*, which it said was mediocre. Praising the graphics but criticising the sparse sound, the game showed Cecco's immense future promise. He talks fondly of Mikro-Gen as being a time of discovery with each game built on the last one in terms of the technology and quality of





» [Spectrum] This Travelodge-looking room was the start of Mad Martha's adventure.

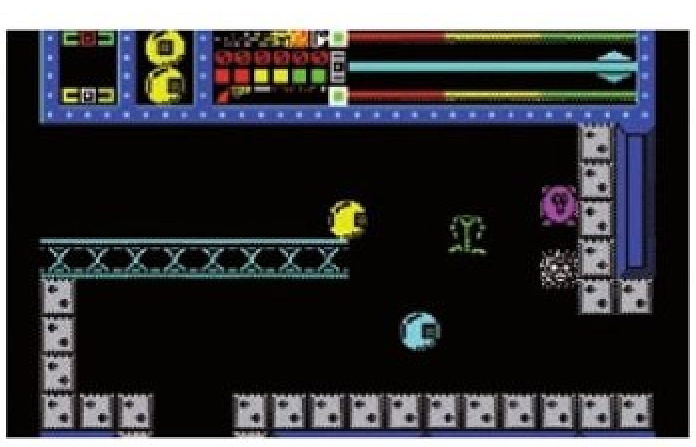
“Sometimes we decided the day was to be spent trying to beat the bendy bar record” WORK WAS TOUGH, SAYS CHRIS HINSLEY

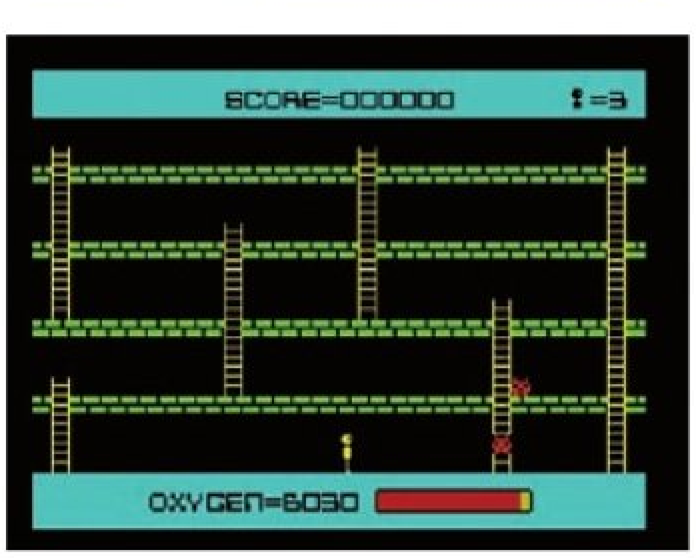


» [Spectrum] The game was hardly a walk in the park, but *Everyone's A Wally* was simply amazing.

graphics. “I had great support as people were constantly bouncing ideas of each other, and you couldn't help but grow,” Cecco says. “The ideas for games were mostly hit upon in light-hearted conversation – no big meetings or anything like that.” Not that everyone got on all of the time. “There could be some friction – I remember David and Nick rolling around having punch-ups occasionally,” he recalls. “Generally speaking we all got on very well and had a great laugh. Chris was definitely the brilliant eccentric, David seemed quite ambitious and Nick was just a very nice down-to-earth guy. Everyone was happy to co-operate and share to get the job done.”

During the programmers' time at Mikro-Gen, the directors tended, at first, to leave them to their own devices. Rather dangerous for guys aged between 18 and 23. “It was complete anarchy in a way, and I'm surprised we ever got anything done,” Cecco laughs. “The Page 3 thing got out of hand one day when someone used the photocopier to wallpaper the entire room. We had a bad static electricity problem at the office so the solution was for David to walk around with a pressurised gardening spray and water the nylon carpets. Bizarre.”





» [Spectrum] We panicked when we couldn't move this fella.

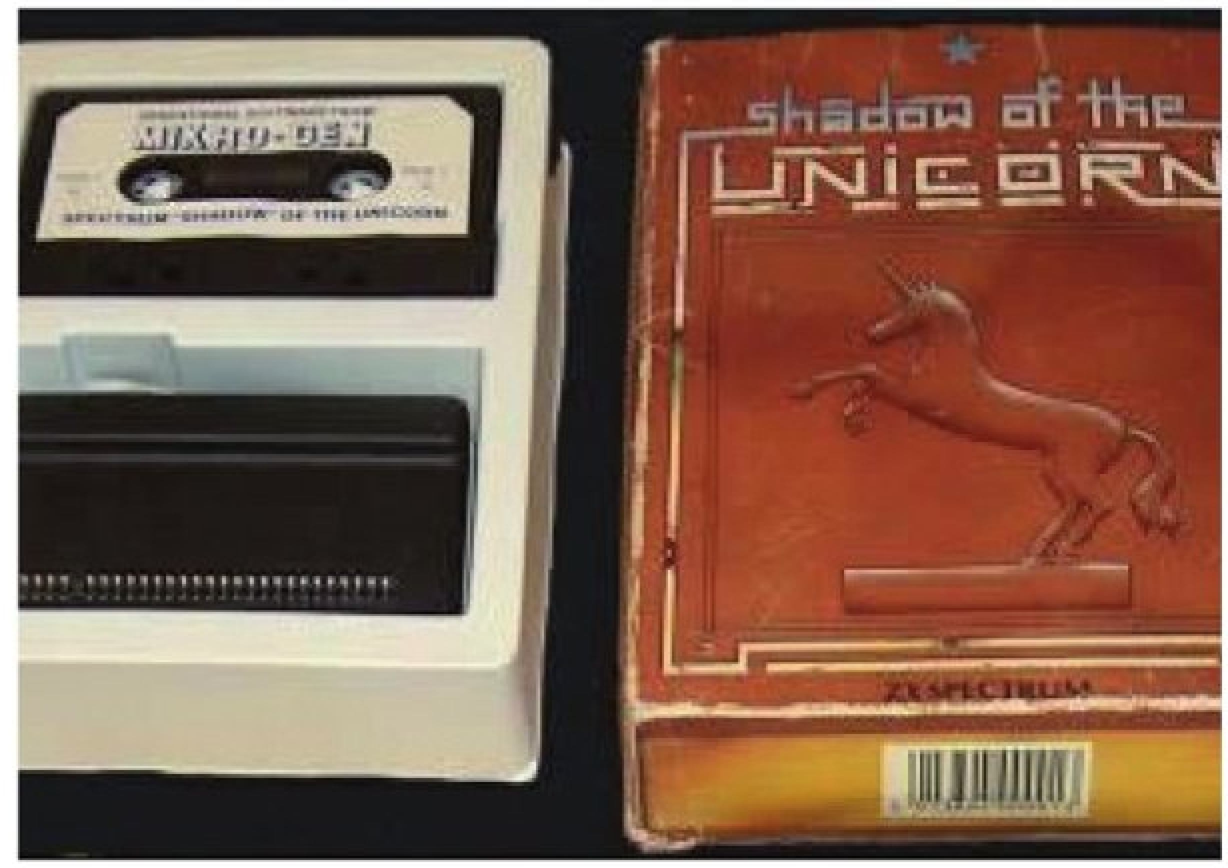
Beginning of the end

And yet the hands-off approach worked very well. Only when the culture changed at Mikro-Gen did things begin to go wrong. The company started to plan future projects and it looked at tie-ins. Up until that point, the programmers had kept things on a roll. They were the driving force behind the products and if they were into an idea and could come up with some way to present it on screen then they just did it.

“The heart of the company was the programming team and management was starting to mess around with our dynamic,” Hinsley reflects. “Moving us to a central office, trying to get us to stop behaving like loonies, spying on us through the door windows… They just didn't understand that we had to be like that in order to generate the ideas and the right vibe.

Soon people began to leave. Perry had programmed *Three Weeks In Paradise* over six months and it was his first solo *Crash* Smash. In 1986 he worked for five months on *Stainless Steel* with Jones, a top-down game that had him vowing never to do another bird's-eye view title. But he decided it was time to call it quits and he went on to work for other London companies such as Elite Systems and Probe Software.

» The Mikro-Plus was bundled with the abysmal *Shadow Of The Unicorn* and bombed. Massively.



Around this time, Mikro-Gen worked with the Mikro-Plus, a hardware add-on that allowed for games that were 50 per cent larger than usual. Specific game routines could be placed on to the hardware chip, which meant memory could be used more effectively. *Shadow Of The Unicorn* was the first Mikro-Plus game, but it proved to be Mikro-Gen's undoing. The firm invested £130,000 in the project and ordered 25,000 units of *Unicorn*, yet to break even, *Sinclair User* said it needed to sell 40,000.

“It was a revolutionary idea at the time: put the game on a ROM chip with an additional 16KB and a joystick port instead of a cassette tape and charge £14.95 instead of £5.95 or whatever it was,” says Cecco, who went to Hewson Consultants and got a freelance contract. “Unfortunately, the games being produced for it were rubbish. They had made the mistake of not putting their best programmers on the project – Chris, David, myself and Nick had nothing to do with *Shadow Of The Unicorn*. The whole thing was canned at the end, and it resulted in one of the directors leaving. The whole company moved into a bigger setup in Bracknell, and it was downhill all the way from then.”

The team realised that freelance game designers and programmers could make a very good living on their own, especially with the track record they had. Cecco and Hinsley bought a house together and lived there for a while, regularly having arcade machines delivered to their door and placed in the hallway for them to copy. “The temptation to go it alone, buy your own CPM/DOS dev machine and write your own titles proved too much,” says Hinsley. “We all left Mikro-Gen and went freelance, still passing code around and graphics editors, but each doing our own contracts.”

But the team doesn't regret a thing. Hinsley adds: “I believe all of us would view that time as one of the best in our lives, the freedom to explore our ideas with such a talented bunch of crazy guys.”

A FINE MESS

The Micro-Plus hardware add-on proved massively controversial – praised by the media for its innovation but looked upon with scepticism within Mikro-Gen. Very soon, it was forgotten about by everybody.

Programmer Chris Hinsley said the concept itself was simple. Mikro-Gen, in having the idea of an expandable ROM pack that you plugged into your Spectrum with 16KB of memory and a built-in joystick adapter, was supposed to bring more room for its games. It was also seen as being impossible to pirate and it was also going to sell for just a few more pounds than tapes at the time.

“Everyone, and I mean everyone – distributors, other game publishers, all of them – were keen to jump on the bandwagon,” says Hinsley. “All were waiting to see how the first game went down before licensing the technology. Mikro-Gen would have ruled the business if this had been a success.”

Director Mike Meek planned to bring two games to market at once using Mikro-Plus: *Three Weeks In Paradise* and *Shadow Of The Unicorn*. “All the programming team, bar the guy that wrote *SOTU*, thought that *SOTU* was total crud and that we should wait and release *TWIP* first, but Mike insisted it shipped first because it was ready first. Not only did the reviewers think *SOTU* was crap, it also meant nobody wanted to sign for Mikro-Plus any more, and Mikro-Gen had loads of stock of ROMs that we couldn't sell and so had a cash crisis.”

Three Weeks In Paradise was re-coded to take out all the extra graphics and gameplay that went on the ROM. Mikro-Gen never recovered from the mess.



» RETROREVIVAL

Bugaboo (The Flea)

AN ITCH WORTH SCRATCHING



» SPECTRUM
» QUICKSILVA
» 1983

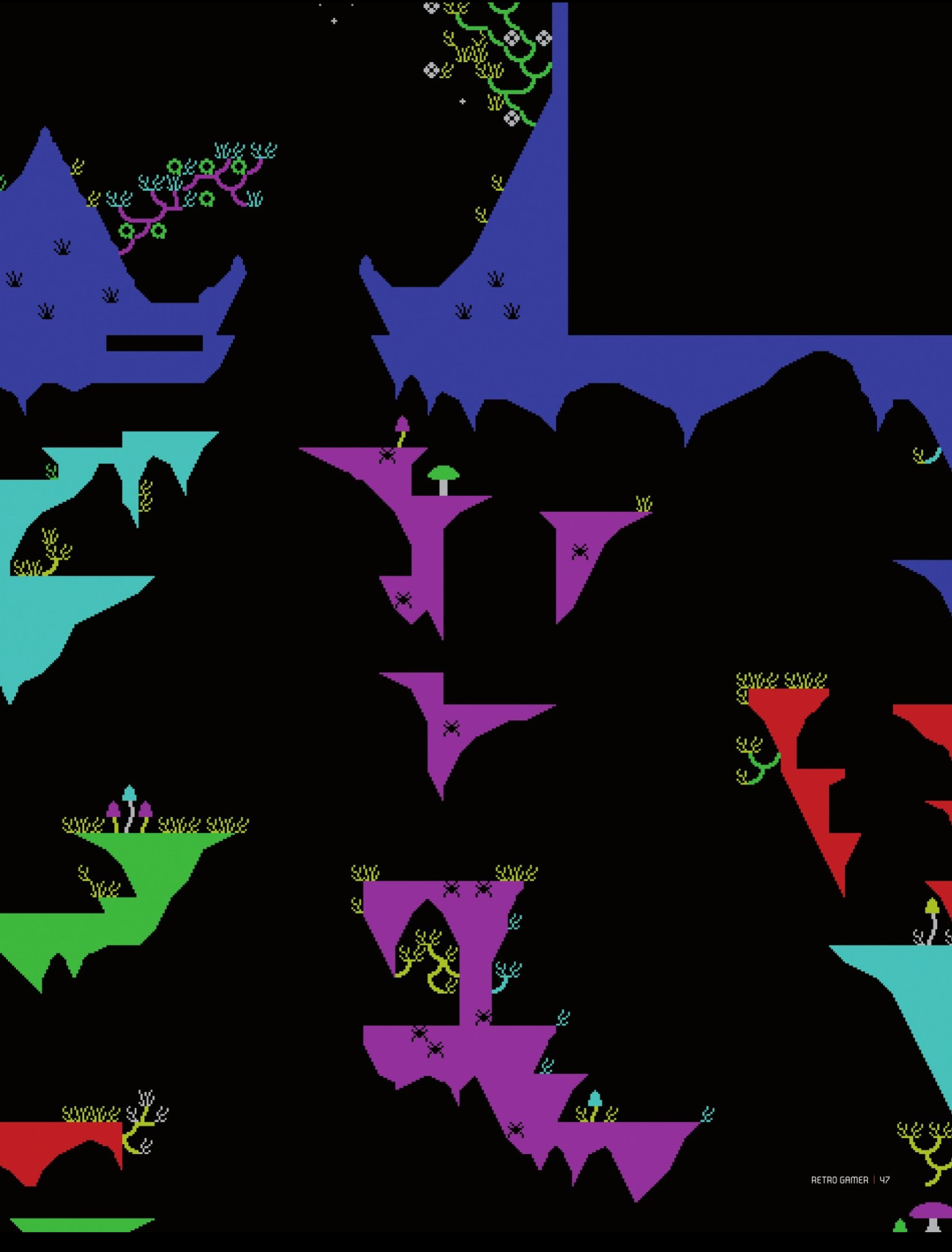
When John Donne wrote, 'Mark but this flea, and mark in this, how little that which thou deniest me is; It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,' was he referring to Bugaboo, the star of this unique Spectrum title? No, because he was a 17th Century poet using rhyming couplets to try to get into his mistress's knickers. However, his words were strangely prescient, as *Bugaboo* sucked many hours of my young life while denying me any reward for my efforts.

The premise was beautifully simple: help Bugaboo escape from the depths of an alien cave system by jumping upward from ledge to ledge towards the surface and freedom. The strength of your skip was determined by how long you held down left or right, allowing much subtlety from the two-key control system. It also led to frequent leaps of faith and many frustrating tumbles downward.

Things would have been tough enough even without the roaming dragon that invariably gobbled up poor Bugaboo when he was but a hop away from success. It remains one of the Speccy's sternest tests, yet there was something about the flea that made you persist, experimenting with new routes and strategies.

Our featured map is from the original Spectrum game, courtesy of Dean from **project64.c64.org**, though I actually spent my hours failing on the Commodore 64 version, which added a little faux-3D to the visuals and made them look especially unearthly. I am also contractually bound by my editor to mention the Amstrad port, rebranded as *Roland In The Caves*, which our Darran describes as "vastly superior" in his usual non-partisan manner. Whichever version 'sucks thee', I hope you make it out alive. Then tell me how.

PS. The game originated from Spain and is credited to 'Paco & Paco'. In researching this piece, I have managed to contact one of the Pacos responsible for this intriguing one-off. Expect the full *La Pulga* story sometime this summer. ✱



TAKING BACK THE STREETS

The History of Streets Of Rage

When Sega decided to take on Capcom's seminal Final Fight, it created a trilogy of the most playable and memorable examples of the genre. Damien McFerran bares his knuckles and explores the history of the Streets Of Rage series

In this modern era of first-person shooters and ultra-realistic racing simulations, it's hard to believe that, at the start of the Nineties, the humble side-scrolling brawler was the object of many a gamer's affections. The public's penchant for gritty urban brawlers was kick-started by 1987's *Double Dragon*, and would continue well into the next decade thanks to coin-ops like Sega's *Golden Axe*, Capcom's *Final Fight* and Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Outside one-on-one scrappers like *Street Fighter II*, ports of intense 2D side-scrolling fighters were arguably the most eagerly awaited of all arcade conversions.

In fact, the early battles between the Sega Mega Drive and Nintendo's SNES were typified by the genre. *Golden Axe* was one of Sega's key launch titles, and when Nintendo managed to secure a seemingly exclusive hold on Capcom's aforementioned *Final Fight* for the debut of the SNES, the exasperated sighs of Mega Drive owners worldwide were positively deafening. Despite the fact that the port was missing the two-player mode, one of the playable characters and an entire level, it was nonetheless a massive coup for Nintendo's new 16-bit powerhouse – a fact that wasn't lost on the executives at Sega of Japan. Although it can't be said with any degree of certainty that *Streets Of Rage* was Sega's direct response to the SNES *Final Fight* conversion, it's hard to imagine that the company's decision to create a thematically similar



» Although the games have always been of a high standard, the same cannot be said for the appalling box art that Sega continually used.

game wasn't somehow linked to Nintendo and Capcom's deal.

Like so many Mega Drive owners at the time, *Streets Of Rage* expert James Newton's first impression of the game was one of shock and awe. "I remember being blown away by the animation," reveals James, who now works as a journalist, reporting on the industry. "To my young eyes it was like having an arcade-quality beat-'em-up in the home, and a real watershed moment for me." It was clear that, with this game, Sega was making a bold statement: that its machine could handle simultaneous two-player, three playable characters, and a wide and varied selection of levels. "The removal of multiplayer from the Super NES version of *Final Fight* really hurt that game, so Sega's title having a full two-player mode was quite a selling point," elaborates James. "Two-player co-operative play was a big feature and playing all the way through the game with a friend even opens up an alternative ending. There's also the opportunity to call in police backup when things get really hairy, with mortar fire acting like a smart bomb to take out the bad guys."

The robust action provided by the game was enticing, and was ably supported by a remarkable soundtrack composed by Yuzo Koshiro – who was also responsible for *Revenge Of Shinobi*'s standout score. "It was unlike anything you'd heard from a Mega Drive in the past," comments James when asked to explain the appeal of the music. "There are elements of dance, reggae, techno and more in there, all composed with a surprising amount of heart and emotion. The arrangements are intricate and really make the Mega Drive's sound chip sing, and each fits the stage's atmosphere so well you can't hear a tune without thinking back to the accompanying level." Indeed, Koshiro succeeded in overcoming one of the console's biggest limitations: its relatively primitive sound hardware. Compared to the SNES, the Mega Drive traditionally struggled to cook up truly epic aural accompaniment, but *Streets Of Rage* proved beyond all doubt that it could be done.



» [Mega Drive] It always amazed us that the police artillery is able to destroy enemies yet leave our heroes unscathed.



» [Master System] Sega's 8-bit ports were as faithful as you could possibly expect, but corners were cut.

Streets Of Rage was a massive hit with Mega Drive owners, and a sequel of some description was almost inevitable. With *Streets Of Rage 2*, Sega completely overhauled the gameplay and graphics to create what many people deem to be the format's finest hour.

"The most noticeable upgrade was the huge increase in character sprite size," says James. "Looking back at the original *Streets Of Rage* now, the sprites seem a bit measly, but the sequel really beefed up the characters while keeping the same speed and animation quality. It also introduced a two-player head-to-head mode – no doubt inspired by the success of *Street Fighter II* – and the superb co-operative mode was retained and improved upon, with four characters to choose from. Each fighter also benefited from new animations and unique special moves." *Streets Of Rage 2* managed to better its predecessor in practically every department. "It took everything great about the first one and tightened it all up," continues James. "As Sega's first 16-megabit cartridge, it had plenty of room for great graphics and sound, and Sega really pulled out all the stops to deliver. It's hardly revolutionary in gameplay terms, but it achieves everything it sets out to do, all wrapped up in some of the best presentation seen on a 16-bit console."

It's worth noting that around this time Sega was fighting fierce hardware wars on multiple fronts. The 8-bit Master System was still incredibly popular in Europe, and the firm's Game Gear was waging a portable conflict against Nintendo's incumbent Game Boy handheld. To support these two formats, Sega downscaled several key Mega Drive franchises, with the original *Streets Of Rage* being one such release.

"The Master System port sadly lacks the two-player mode but includes an exclusive boss, which

POLICE SQUAD



Axel Stone
A determined martial artist with a love of videogames and white T-shirts, Axel is the solid all-rounder of the bunch and arguably the franchise's main protagonist. His 'Grand Upper' special move is useful for pushing back resilient enemies.

Blaze Fielding
Alongside Axel, Blaze is a playable character in all three *Streets Of Rage* titles. She's fast, but her speed comes at the expense of strength. Not one to fear the cold, she's particularly fond of short skirts that expose her knickers.





Adam Hunter
Only playable in the first game, Adam is a boxer with a long reach but slow speed. He is central to the plot of the second game because he manages to get himself kidnapped, forcing his kid brother Skate to become involved.

Eddie 'Skate' Hunter
The younger brother of Adam Hunter appears in the second and third games as a playable character and is called 'Sammy' in the Japanese version. One of his attacks involves leaping onto the head of the enemy and punching them repeatedly.





Max Thunder
As a professional wrestler and accomplice of Axel, Max is clearly intended to be *Streets Of Rage*'s answer to *Final Fight*'s brawler-turned-mayor Mike Haggar. He's slow but powerful, showcasing devastating grapple moves and disarmingly tight spandex.

Dr Zan
A boffin with robotic limbs, Dr Zan is quite slow, but his extendable arms allow him to lash out from a distance. He's able to run electric currents down these appendages, which makes him kind of like a deadly version of Mr Tickle from the *Mr Men*.



wasn't seen in other modes," explains James. "The Game Gear version was cut down to six stages but did include two-player mode via a system link cable. They're admirable and surprisingly faithful attempts at replicating the game under 8-bit constraints, but neither can hold a candle to the 16-bit originals." *Streets Of Rage 2* was also converted to these two systems, with similarly workmanlike results.

Back on the Mega Drive, the action continued unabated. After much hype, 1994 saw the emergence of *Streets Of Rage 3*, a title that boasted 24 megabits of memory and even more bone-crunching gameplay.

"There was a new character and new moves, including special weapon-based attacks – Axel gets a 'Shoryuken'-style sword attack, for example – and a greater emphasis on plot, with cut-scenes keeping you up to speed on what's going on, which is just as well, because the storyline's a little off-the-wall," explains James. "Graphically it was another huge boost, coming on a 24-megabit cartridge that also meant the levels could be longer, with several possible endings thrown into the mix as well."

Ultimately, though, it would be a title that divided the critics of the time. "I think that *Streets Of Rage 3* was a departure from the previous game but perhaps not in the right ways," admits James. "A cybernetic scientist and boxing kangaroo were so out of keeping with the game's seedy atmosphere that it surprises me Sega went with them. *Streets Of Rage 2* improved on the original in so many ways that Sega was never going to make the same quantum leap again, and that's the third game's biggest problem: had this been released instead of *2*, everyone would have said it was amazing, but Sega set the bar so high that it was always going to be tough to improve."

Another criticism that reviewers of the era had was the perceived downturn in the quality of the music on offer: "The first two games had such incredible music that Koshiro was going to struggle to top it, but the soundtrack was composed in a very innovative and different way: Koshiro and collaborator Motohiro Kawashima used an experimental 'automatic note generator'. The resultant techno style was probably ahead of its time and wasn't to everyone's tastes. Although the soundtrack lacks the standout tunes that typify Koshiro's other output, it's still worthy of reassessment."

This is a sentiment that can be applied to the entire game. With hindsight, it's easier to see just how brilliant the third title is: not only does it feature a significantly deeper combat system, but it also



» All that remains of the Dreamcast *Streets Of Rage 4* are a few short prototype videos.

MEMORABLE BOSSES



Ultimate Warrior (Streets Of Rage)
With that rippling physique, unique facepaint and abysmal hairstyle, there's no mistaking the inspiration for this character – it's clear that Sega's designers were big fans of the WWF's Ultimate Warrior. Unsurprisingly, this foe favours grapple attacks, so try to keep him at a distance.



Ash (Bare Knuckle 3)
Exclusive to the Japanese version of the third title, this rather effeminate chap prances around the screen in stockings and suspenders, looking every inch like a beefed-up stereotypical member of the Village People. Unsurprisingly, he was removed from the Western version – although his sprite can be accessed using a cheat code.



Mr X
The evil leader of the shadowy Syndicate, which is holding the city to ransom with its reign of terror, this formally attired antagonist appears in all three *Streets Of Rage* titles. Never one to play by the rules, Mr X is rarely seen without his deadly standard-issue machine gun.



Yamato (Streets Of Rage 3)
A spooky samurai clad in blood-red armour, this spectral dude uses ninja magic to create two clones of himself, which must be defeated before you can have a pop at the real deal. The key is to keep moving and watch for his leaping katana attacks.



Robot Y
(Streets Of Rage 3)
By the time you reach the end of *Streets Of Rage 3*, it becomes apparent that Mr X has gone a bit loopy and encased his brain in a jar. He controls Robot Y (Neo-X in the Japanese version), a deadly cybernetic warrior with rocket boosters and astonishing speed.



» [Mega Drive] With its robot armies and boxing kangaroos, the third game in the series is something of a departure in the sanity stakes.

> **“In its infinite wisdom, Sega of America passed on Streets Of Rage 4”**

has bold and better visuals. Interestingly, there are some significant disparities between the Japanese and Western editions, as James explains: “The biggest difference was the huge increase in difficulty: the Western version’s normal mode is even harder than Japan’s most difficult level, which was rare in those days, as it is today. Sega also made a few content decisions in some delicate areas, changing female costumes to less revealing outfits and removing gay stereotype boss Ash altogether. The plot was completely changed too: the Japanese story involves missing military generals, explosive substances and the White House, whereas Westerners played through a story of robot clones trying to take control of the city.” Given these sweeping changes, it should come as no great shock to learn that the Western version’s plot is madder than a bag of spiders.

With the third instalment arriving during the Mega Drive’s twilight years, a fourth 16-bit entry wasn’t on the cards and things went quiet for Axel and company. It wasn’t until the launch of the 32-bit Sega Saturn that the rumour mill started to churn once more; not long after the console hit the shelves, word began to spread that UK-based Core Design – a staunch Sega supporter since the days of the Mega-CD – had been commissioned to produce an all-new *Streets Of Rage* title. Sadly, the road to release was rocky, and the eventual product didn’t bear the legendary name, as James explains: “It was originally conceived as the series’ first 3D outing, but disputes between Sega Europe and Core Design about bringing the game to rival formats – including the PlayStation and N64 – meant Sega understandably revoked the licence. Sega then pledged to publish the game under the moniker *Fighting Force* after original publisher Eidos dropped the Saturn version, but that fell through as well – probably a good thing considering the mediocre reviews it received on other machines.”

The Saturn came and went without a visit from the *Streets Of Rage* crew, and by the time the Dreamcast hit the market, many had consigned the entire genre to the scrap heap. However, behind the scenes, efforts to resuscitate the series were being made.

“A Dreamcast *Streets Of Rage 4* was in development by the original team, who developed a prototype to demonstrate to Sega of America for approval, with Yuzo Koshiro on board too,” reveals James. “However, in their infinite wisdom, the executives at Sega of America passed on the concept, and development of what could have been a great Dreamcast game was stopped in its tracks.”

Video footage of the game in action has since been leaked onto the internet, and it shows a promising 3D fighter with an interesting optional first-person viewpoint. While it’s unlikely that it could have rescued the Dreamcast from a premature death, it’s a game that many fans feel poorer for not having had the opportunity to experience first-hand.

Although true-blooded Sega fans still become animated when they think of a true sequel to Sega’s most famous side-scroller, the moment has arguably passed. With recent reboot failures such as *Final Fight: Streetwise* and *Golden Axe: Beast Rider*, one has to wonder if Sega – or any company, for that matter – will attempt to revisit this classic genre again.

“*Streets Of Rage* is one of those series you never want to see ruined,” says James. “What initially seems like a very simple gameplay premise – walk right, beat up bad guys, repeat – is actually a huge amount of fun, but it could just as easily become a repetitive bore with a few dodgy decisions. Sure, it would be nice to get a Capcom-style HD remix of the 16-bit series, but considering the original games are available on almost every platform known to man, it wouldn’t make much sense. I suspect Sega will abandon *Streets Of Rage* the way it has so many of its beloved franchises – and perhaps it’s best that way.”

COMIC VIOLENCE



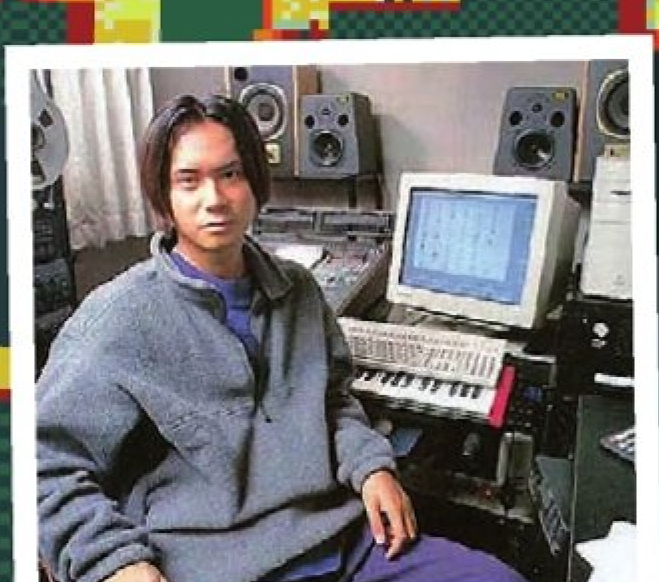
LIKE FELLOW SEGA titles *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Ecco The Dolphin* and *Decap Attack*, *Streets Of Rage* was immortalised in print thanks to a short-lived UK-produced comic series back in the early Nineties. Penned by Scottish writer Mark Millar – who would later write *Wanted* and *Kick-Ass* – and illustrated by Peter Richardson, the series was serialised in Fleetway’s popular *Sonic The Comic* publication. Because they were created after the release of *Streets Of Rage 2*, the comics feature Skate and Max, with Skate’s brother Adam, who was a playable character in the first game, being notably absent. Like all good graphic novels, the *Streets Of Rage* adaptation has its moments of crazy hilarity – at one point it is revealed that there’s more than one Mr X, with the first one having been unfortunately killed in a swimming accident. You can view the entire series at **www.defaced.co.uk/geekenvy**



» The failure of other side-scrolling reboots may mean that we truly have seen the end of *Streets Of Rage*.



RAGING BEATS



STREETS OF RAGE may be famous for its addictive gameplay, but it’s also well-remembered thanks to its pumping soundtrack. Rumour has it that composer Yuzo Koshiro was so enamoured with the Mega Drive’s Yamaha YM2612 sound chip that he had one installed in his studio, which might go some way to explaining why he was able to extract such impressive results from the otherwise underwhelming hardware. Koshiro’s work on the *Streets Of Rage* series was so well-received that it was released on CD in Japan, and is now a collector’s item. He would also add his musical embellishments to Enix’s *ActRaiser* and eventually founded his own studio, Ancient. The company produced the brilliant *Beyond Oasis* (aka *Story Of Thor*) for the Mega Drive, and its most recent release is *Protect Me Knight* for Xbox Live Arcade.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



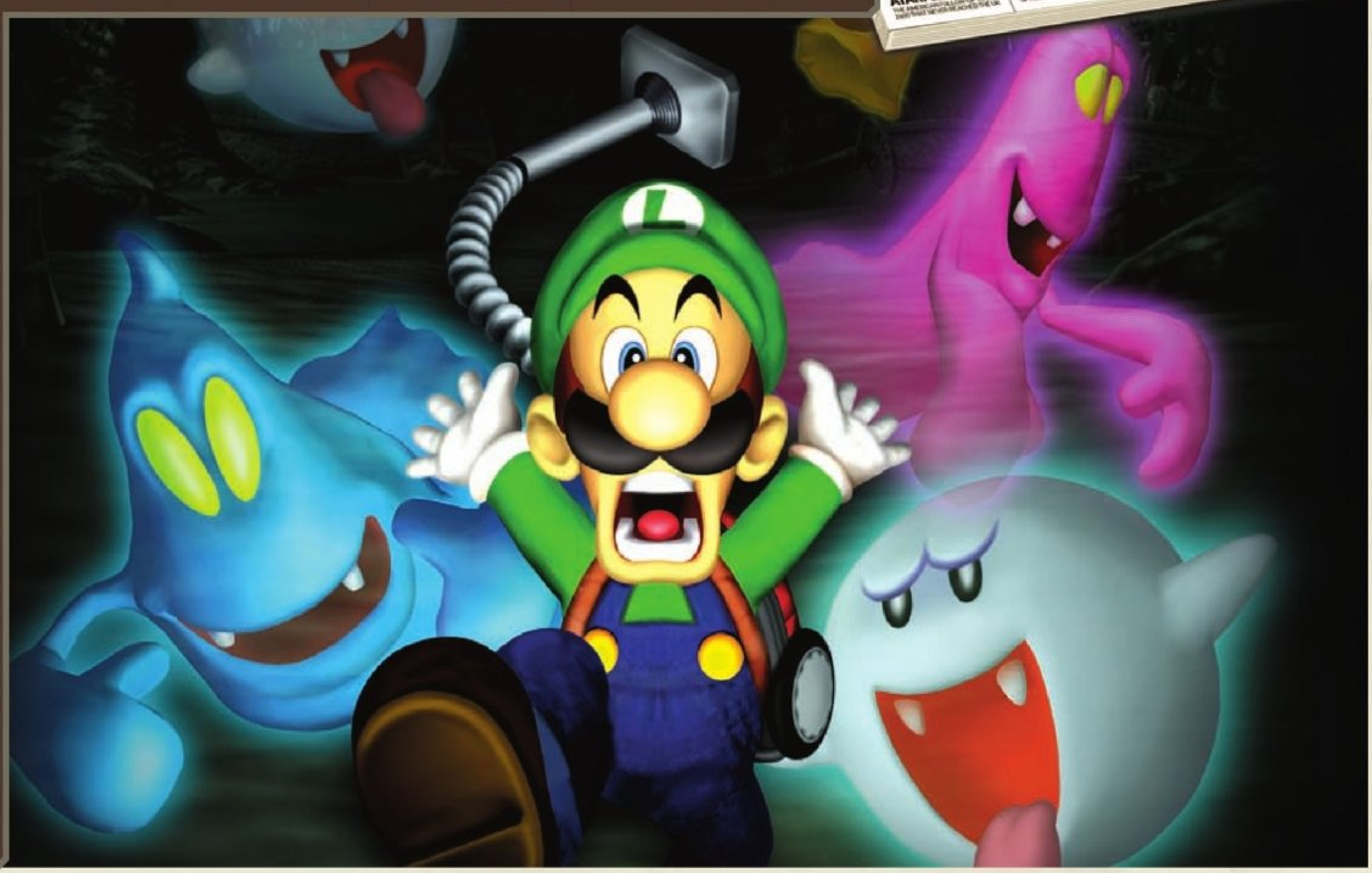


INFO

- **Featured System:** GameCube
- **Year Released:** 2001
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** Nintendo EAD
- **Key People:** Hideki Konno (director), Shigeru Miyamoto (producer), Takashi Tezuka (producer)
- **Buy it for:** £10+

GO DEEPER

- ***Luigi's Mansion* sold over 2.5 million units in the US.**
- **As with many of Kazumi Totaka's soundtracks, *Luigi's Mansion* contains *Totaka's Song*.**



06. LUIGI'S MANSION

Darran Jones professes his love for Luigi's Mansion and explains why it's one of the GameCube's most underrated games

THE BACKGROUND

The most interesting aspect of *Luigi's Mansion* only came to light a few short months ago when a roundtable interview was hosted by IGN at the 2010 E3. Hideki Konno, Nintendo's development head of Nintendo EAD Software Development Group 1, who is currently spearheading the 3DS project, revealed the following information:

"When I was directing *Luigi's Mansion*, we experimented with placing a 3D panel on the screen and making it play in 3D. However, at that time we had screen resolution issues and cost issues. And to separately sell a panel for 3D gameplay wasn't a practical idea as a mass-market product."

In a way, it's typical of Nintendo being ahead of its time, but one of the biggest and most completely unjustified complaints of *Luigi's Mansion* – that it's far too short – is now de rigueur in the industry.

Originally unveiled at Nintendo Space World 2000, *Luigi's Mansion* started off as a tech demo in order to show off the GameCube's impressive lighting and particle effects, but by Nintendo's next event it was revealed as a brand new adventure. To no doubt help establish it as a brand new title, Luigi, rather than Mario, became the star of the game, making the system the first home console in Nintendo's history to not actually feature a *Mario* game in its launch line-up.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of *Luigi's Mansion*, though, is that even though it received almost universal praise in every review we've ever read about it – so-called longevity issues aside – the scores never tallied up. It's almost as if reviewers couldn't accept that Luigi and not his brother was launching a new console. Despite the barely above average scores, *Luigi's Mansion* still went on to become the GameCube's bestselling launch game, an accolade that it thoroughly deserves.

THE GAME

When King Boo and his 50 loyal servants capture Mario, the cowardly Luigi must step up to the plate

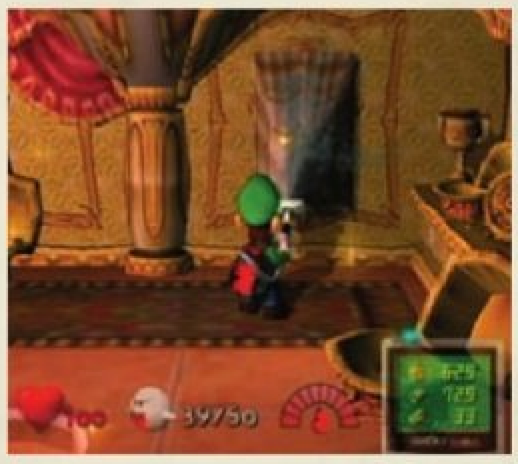
Things of note











Game Boy Horror

Shaped like the Game Boy Color, this handy little device works like a PDA and allows you to check your map, list your items and see if any Boos are skulking nearby. You can then use a camera to search for them.

Mario? Marrriiooo!

Luigi's Mansion oozes charm. While pressing the A button is normally used to search for hidden money and ghosts, it also results in Luigi giving out a plaintive call to his missing brother. It never fails to raise a smile.

Ghouls 'N Ghosts

In addition to the Boos and portrait ghosts that Luigi has to defeat, there are also an additional eight general ghosts, each with their own traits, who constantly harass you as you explore the large mansion.

Bowser trouble

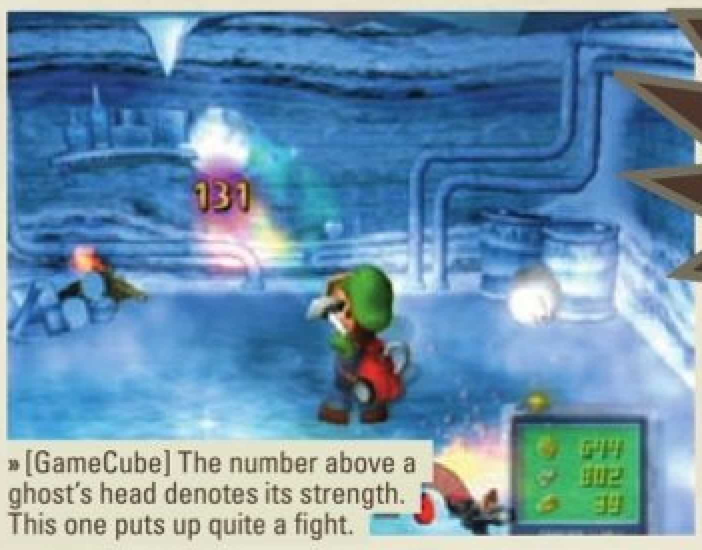
Okay, so it's not technically a *Mario* game, but that hasn't stopped Bowser from making an appearance. All right, it's not really Bowser – it's King Boo in a metal suit – but it still serves as a fitting ending to the game.

Better than a Proton Pack

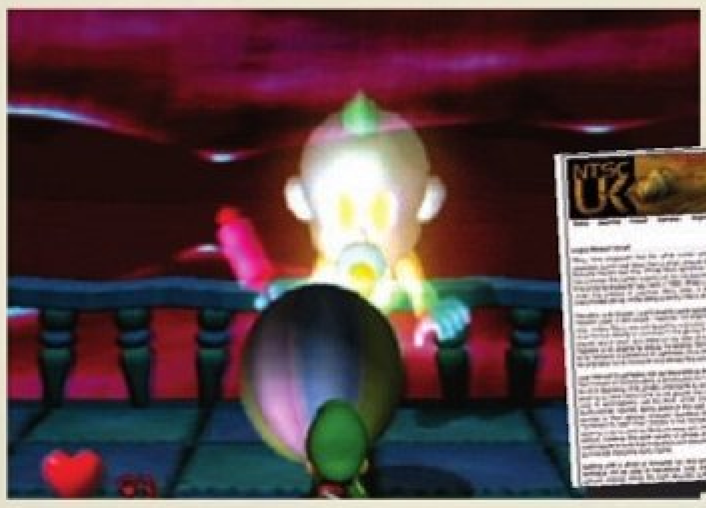
The Ghostbusters walk around with unlicensed nuclear accelerators on their backs, but they couldn't suck up money or use their Proton Packs to solve clever puzzles. The Poltergust 3000 can. Take that, Venkman.



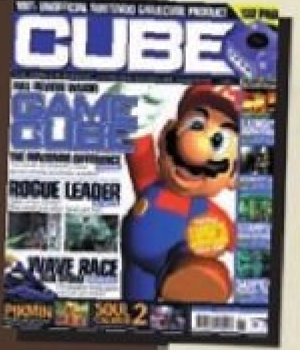
» [GameCube] *Luigi's Mansion* is filled with humour that adds massively to the game's appeal.



» [GameCube] The number above a ghost's head denotes its strength. This one puts up quite a fight.



What the press thought



Cube
Score: 7.6/10
"Lingers on the brink of being incredible… before taking a rather large step back and looking a little forlorn."

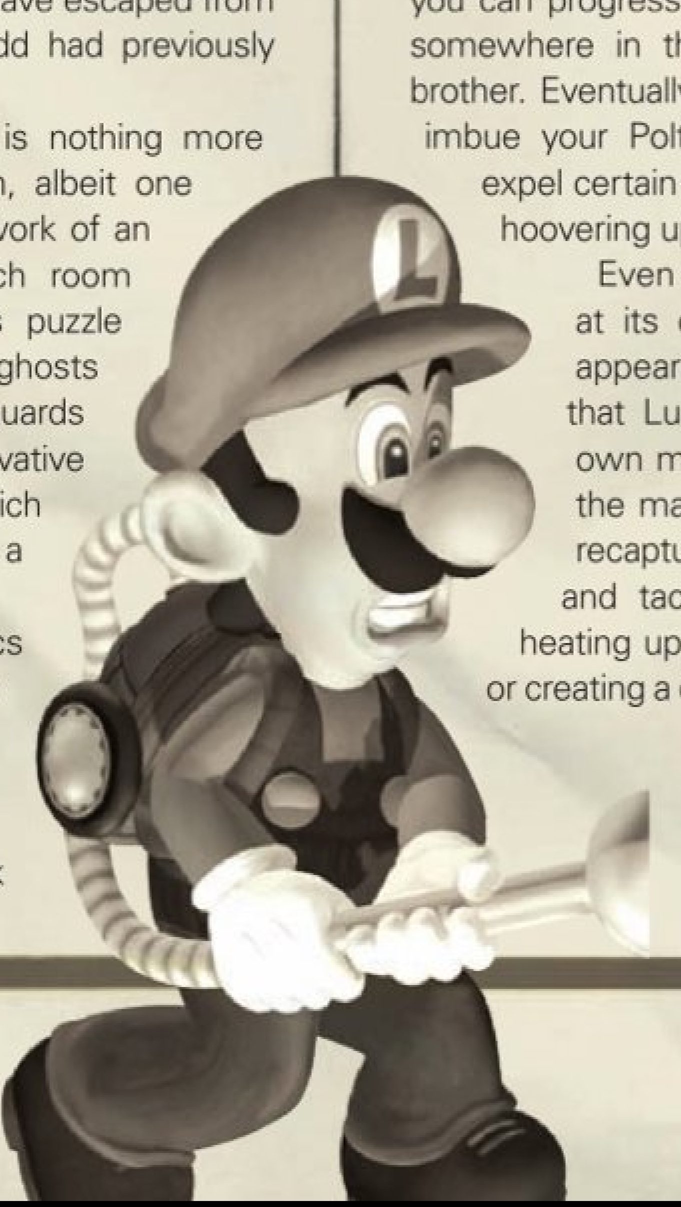


NTSC-uk.com
Score: 7/10
"A modest example of what the GC is capable of and a polished title, like we expect from Nintendo."

and rescue his more heroic brother. Armed with his trusty Poltergust 3000 and a Game Boy Horror, and guided by the scatty Professor E Gadd, Luigi must slowly explore the huge mansion and not only rescue Mario, but also suck up King Boo's cohorts and another group of ghouls that have escaped from the picture prisons in which Gadd had previously imprisoned them.

At its heart, *Luigi's Mansion* is nothing more than a straightforward boss rush, albeit one cleverly hidden within the framework of an imposing haunted mansion. Each room that Luigi enters cleverly mixes puzzle and action elements – certain ghosts can only be captured when their guards are down – to create a highly innovative and entertaining experience, which is as refreshing today as it was a decade ago.

Utilising gameplay mechanics that the official *Ghostbusters* game failed to improve on eight years later, Luigi's battles mainly revolve around sucking up ghosts by utilising both the directional stick and C-stick. It's a beautifully simplistic mechanic that also elicits great humour, due to the poor plumber often being dragged around helplessly by larger opponents as he struggles to gain the upper hand. Clear out all the ghosts in a particular room and you can progress to the next one, ever aware that somewhere in the gigantic mansion is your lost brother. Eventually items can be picked up that will imbue your Poltergust 3000 with the power to expel certain elements, but the core concept of hoovering up ghosts rarely ever changes.



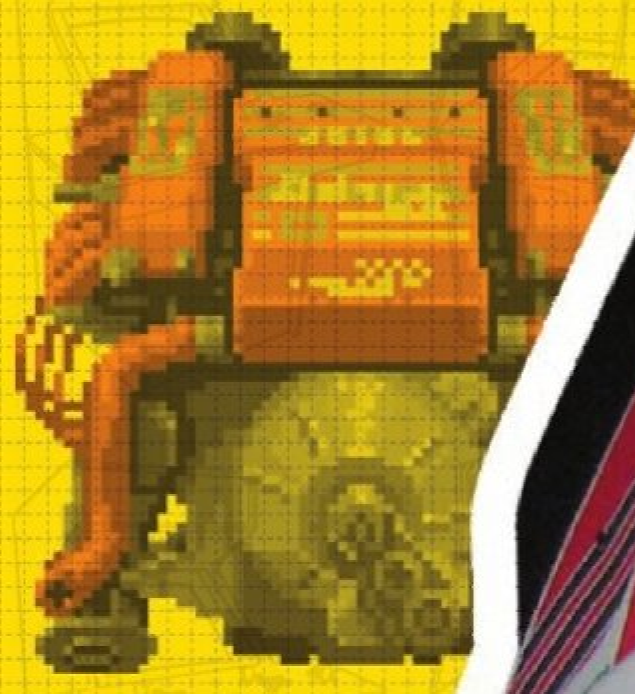
Even with such repetitive gameplay at its core, *Luigi's Mansion* never ever appears… well, repetitive. Each room that Luigi unlocks effectively acts as its own mini-stage, with ghosts – especially the many portrait ghosts that Luigi must recapture – all requiring new techniques and tactics to beat them. Whether it's heating up a ghoul's meal so that he'll eat it, or creating a draft to distract a vain spook, you're always impressed by the sheer inventiveness and humour to the situations that the game keeps throwing at you.

Add in masses of charm, humour and character – fake doors crush Luigi flat, while the clearly spooked out plumber nervously hums along to the game's soundtrack and calls out to his brother – and *Luigi's Mansion* proves that even the most cowardly of heroes can have his day.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Everything about *Luigi's Mansion* is a joy to experience. The pacing, despite its shortness, is superb; it's filled with a variety of clever mechanics; and it features a range of clever and inventive boss encounters. Yes, it's amazingly streamlined and essentially a simple boss rush, but it's one that you'll constantly find yourself returning to, simply because it's just so damned entertaining to play.

The game's perceived lack of longevity also works in its favour, as the mansion is such a joy to explore that you'll constantly want to replay it, if only so you can finally nab all of King Boo's hard-to-find servants and replay your favourite encounters. Criminally overlooked, certainly by critics, on release, *Luigi's Mansion* truly is a slice of gaming brilliance that people are slowly but ever so surely beginning to warm to. What took you all so long?

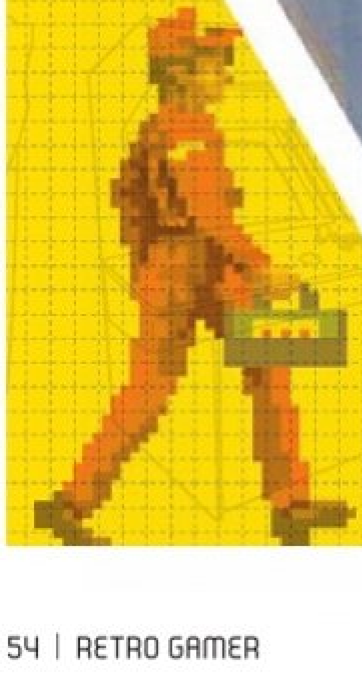




IN THE KNOW

- » **Name:** Turbo OutRun
- » **Released:** 1989
- » **Publisher:** Sega
- » **Developer:** Sega-AM2
- » **Price:** £300-1,000
- » **By The Same Developer:** Hang-On, After Burner





COIN-OP CAPERS

#9 Turbo OutRun

Martyn Carroll takes a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravels its brilliance through those who know it best





Sega designer Yu Suzuki memorably revealed in RG 54 that his chief inspiration for *OutRun* was the madcap chase movie *The Cannonball Run*. It's fitting, then, that the 1989 sequel, *Turbo OutRun*, is a lot like *Cannonball Run II*: it features much more of everything that made the original so great, yet it's somehow less than the sum of its parts. It just doesn't work as well second time around.

That's not to say that *Turbo OutRun* is terrible. Far from it. As with *Cannonball Run II*, you can imagine that the creative team had a ball throwing around goofy ideas and seeing which ones stuck. For a start, there's your 'rival', a dude in a white convertible who you're competing against for the affections of the hot blonde passenger – he waves his fist and shouts, "Take a hike, pal!" when you're trading paint at 300kph. You're also up against state cops in ridiculously fast cruisers who try to ram you off the road. Other hazards include ridges on the road that bump you into the air, patches of water and oil that slow you down, and barrels, barriers and other unlikely items in your path. There's even the odd bit of bad weather that makes driving tricky.

It's a good job that with all this stuff designed to impede your progress, the designers readdressed the balance by fitting a turbo package to your Ferrari F40. The game's chief gimmick is borrowed straight from Sega's earlier two-wheeled racer, *Super Hang-On*, but the way the turbo works is different. Rather than waiting to reach maximum speed before you can boost, you can now use it at any time – the only deterrent being that your engine temporarily overheats if you overuse it. As such, the boost is best reserved for getting back up to speed after a heavy smash.

However, the biggest gameplay change to *Turbo OutRun* is the removal of the different routes through the game. Presented as a trans-USA race from New York to Los Angeles, the game lines up all 16 stages, one after another. On the plus side, this means that decent drivers can see all of the game's stages on a single credit – although this is unlikely, as some of the later stages are evil. The problem, though, is that in removing the forks in the road, that small but delightful sense of freedom you experienced when playing the original is lost, and the game becomes just another checkpoint racer. The fact that an in-game continue option was added suggests that the stage structure was changed with the sole aim of increasing operator profits.

Turbo OutRun was released as both an upgrade kit for all versions of *OutRun* and as a dedicated sit-down cab loosely styled on the F40. This common red 'cockpit' model was non-moving with no motorised mechanism, although Sega did release a special white 'deluxe' model, pictured on the left. This variant appears to have been released in limited numbers and few firm details are known about it.

For home systems, US Gold once again secured the licence and converted the game to a number of computer platforms in time for Christmas 1989. The publisher was so keen to capitalise on the *OutRun* name that it was working on its own sequel, *OutRun Europa*, which had to be put on temporary hold while it handled the *Turbo OutRun* conversion. The game was also ported to the Mega Drive and FM Towns Marty consoles.

What's sad about *Turbo OutRun* is that Sega has almost completely overlooked it since its release. The first game has appeared on compilations and as an unlockable bonus in other titles, yet the sequel never gets a look in. With 2011 marking the 25th anniversary of the original, here's hoping that Sega celebrates its most iconic racer with a commemorative release that bundles together all of the games in the series – the good, the bad, and the indifferent like *Turbo OutRun*. *



COIN-OP CAPERS

the expert



With a Turbo OutRun high score in excess of 60 million, Martin Bedard leaves rival racers choking on Ferrari exhaust fumes. But he isn't done with the game just yet…

PROFILE

- **» Name:** Martin Bedard
- **» Age:** 29
- **» Date of birth:** 23 April 1981
- **» Key Twin Galaxies World Records:**
  1942 [Arcade] 13,360,960
  Smash TV [Arcade] 19,777,280
  OutRun [MAME] 53,064,320

■ Tell us about yourself…
I'm 29 and my hometown is Saint-Lazare, Quebec, a suburb of Montreal. I'm currently working on my degree in electrical engineering.

■ You have achieved high scores on many arcade games. How do you select which records to go for?
I tend to shy away from records that require marathon sessions to achieve. I also like to pick games that haven't been conquered yet or for which the high score doesn't seem possible. In the end, though, it all comes down to how much I enjoy the game. A good soundtrack is a plus as well.

■ Is there any videogame record you're particularly proud of?
I'd say *Smash TV* is one I'm quite pleased with since I'm the only person on record as having finished the game, other than the rumour that one of the creators has as well. I've done this on both MAME and the arcade. The MAME performance in particular was amazing since I finished the game with the maximum nine lives in reserve. I'll never have such a good run again.

■ When and where did you first play *Turbo OutRun*, and what were your initial impressions of the game?
I first noticed *Turbo OutRun* when I visited Funspot in June 2004. I liked the idea of the turbo button for getting out of trouble and the car upgrades were an interesting addition. The size of the car compared to the original felt jarring at first and it seemed like I was crashing into everything. However, the feel of the game and the excellent music was still unmistakably *OutRun*.



» [Arcade] Crazed cops will try to ruin your race by ramming you into other vehicles.

■ When and where did you register your Twin Galaxies coin-op high score of 52,087,460?
That score was set at Funspot in May 2008, during the annual tournament. I had planned out most of my strategy from playing on MAME, but executing it on the arcade came with some challenges. The machine was a stand-up and I needed to operate both pedals simultaneously while whipping the wheel around. Weight distribution was an issue and using a stool was awkward as well. It was still a reasonable score but I long for a sit-down *Turbo OutRun*.

■ Have you managed to top this score since?
I've since had a few games on that same machine in the high 50s without verification. Most of my work has been on MAME, where my current score stands at 63,094,160 with a completion time of 8'24"23. Since you contacted me I've started to play the game again in order to reach the lowest reported final time I've seen of 8'21"03.



■ What do you know about this reported time, and do you think it's genuinely possible to beat it?
The score was taken from a now-defunct database that lists scores from Japanese magazines *Gamest* and *Arcadia*. But like most Japanese records, the player's name is a pseudonym. I myself believed this time wasn't possible since many scores from these sources are ridiculously high. However, I've learned that most true world records are meant to make you cringe. After much work, I've found that all my best stage times put together would beat it by 2-3 seconds.

■ Tell us about your MAME setup.
I use a computer with a 21-inch CRT. For control I use an N64 controller via the now hard-to-find Adaptoid. The analogue stick and numerous buttons can accommodate any game type.

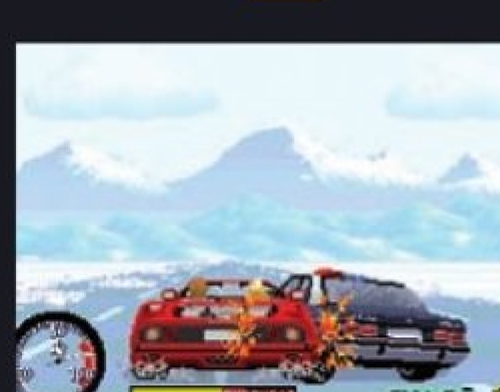
■ You also hold the top Twin Galaxies score for the original

Driving School

Don't forget to clunk clip every trip, and be aware of the following hazards

Your Rival
Here he is, with his ridiculous hair and rubbish car. Boost past him to ensure that you get the girl.





Highway Cops
Smoking the smokeys is easier said than done. When the sirens wail, hope for the best.

Big Rigs
The bane of any outrunner. These lumbering lorries like to hog lanes and generally encourage cries of 'Truck off!'

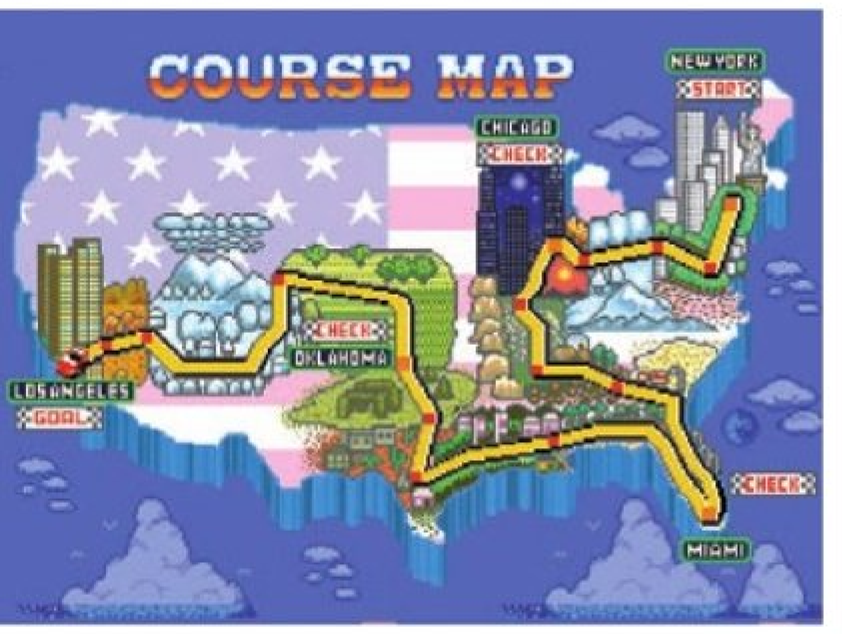




Bad Weather
The rain, snow and sand storms impair your view and make cornering and overtaking tricky.

Flooded Roads
Water and oil slow you down. Avoid them or boost through – but note that boosting ignites the oil!





» The game's 16 stages are split into four legs. At each checkpoint you can pimp your ride with upgraded parts.

***OutRun* on MAME. How do you think the difficulty compares between the two games?**
Turbo OutRun is much more difficult, hands down. The courses are more challenging, and there's more traffic to deal with and less space to do it in. Trucks and scenery can bump you all over the place and cops ruin everything.

■ Are the cops and weather random, or are they triggered at predetermined times?
Weather elements are always the same but the cops are all over the place. I've found no way to predict or mitigate their appearance other than hitting the corners hard and hopefully escaping from them quickly. Sometimes the first couple of cars on at the beginning of a leg are in a familiar place but it quickly becomes unpredictable.

■ As you are studying electrical engineering, have you considered putting your skills to use by restoring old arcade machines?
It did dawn on me that I was working with the building blocks of many beloved classics. Working with old PCBs sounds like something I'd be interested in, but only as a hobby. Perhaps I'll donate my time doing this to Funspot. ✱



MARTIN'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Top tips to help you reach the finish line in record time

1 ■ UPGRADE STRATEGY
Upgrade the tyres first, otherwise you'll be braking constantly or eating scenery. After that it's all about preference, but for a record score you'll want to increase your top speed as soon as possible, so go for the hi-power engine.

2 ■ TURBO TIME
Use the turbo to recover from hard braking or to power through hazards that can't be avoided, such as the rain on the second stage. Of course, you should always use one at the start of each leg.

3 ■ BEAR ON YOUR BACK
There's no definite way to avoid the cops – even the turbo isn't a sure bet in certain situations. If you're willing to sacrifice speed, the best way is to just brake and let them pass. Even if you catch up to them again, they might be non-aggressive or even totalled. If slowing down is not an option, you can try moving to the middle of the screen so you'll have lots of room depending on which side he comes. After dodging his initial bump from behind, slowly nudge to the sides and hope you can take the next corner hard on the inside. You can also try luring him into traffic – difficult but oh so satisfying.

4 ■ ON THE EDGE
Certain hazards can be avoided by driving on the edge of the shoulder. The best example of this would be the long oil slick at the end of the game. When the gravel strip on both sides ends, move right so that you actually bite into the shoulder a tiny bit as you encounter the turn. With the correct timing, you'll clear the corner perfectly and avoid the hazard as well. Compensate for the speed loss with your turbo.

the sequels

In the arcades, there have been three follow-ups to Turbo OutRun…



OutRunners
Released: 1992
Arriving six years after *OutRun*, *OutRunners* is generally regarded as the first true sequel, as it introduces a bunch of new features while bringing back some old ones – notably forks in the road leading to different routes and alternative endings. You get to choose one of eight different cars and race it through 30 stages. Drifting makes its series debut here, and while the controls are a little loose, it's much more enjoyable sliding around corners than hitting the brakes. The key difference, though, is the plural in the title: *OutRunners* is a head-to-head racer with support for up to eight competitors. The dual-monitor cab is driven by Sega's System Multi 32 hardware, and the result is a fast, fun-filled racing game.



OutRun 2
Released: 2003
Sega has a mixed history when it comes to updating its classics, but with *OutRun 2* it really went above and beyond for fans. Taking the original course structure from *OutRun* and adding the 'drift' driving style from *OutRunners*, the end result is one of the best arcade racers ever created. It takes less than five minutes to reach each goal, yet that brief spell behind the wheel, going pretty much flat out through one breathtaking stage after another, is an absolute thrill. And although the game puts fun front and centre, shaving tenths of seconds off your goal times can become a compulsion. Overall, *OutRun 2* is a dazzling update of the classic original.



OutRun 2 SP
Released: 2004
This arcade update introduces 15 new courses, a couple of extra cars and a host of tweaks. It deserves a mention here because it features a number of nods to *Turbo OutRun*. First off, all four tunes are included on the soundtrack, along with the original *OutRun* music. In the game itself, the 'rival' feature returns when you're playing solo and you receive a points bonus for overtaking competitors. Finally, there's a new continuous route where you can race through all of the courses in succession – just like *Turbo OutRun*. If you missed this masterly update in the arcades, make sure you track down *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*, Sumo Digital's brilliant home conversion.

the machine

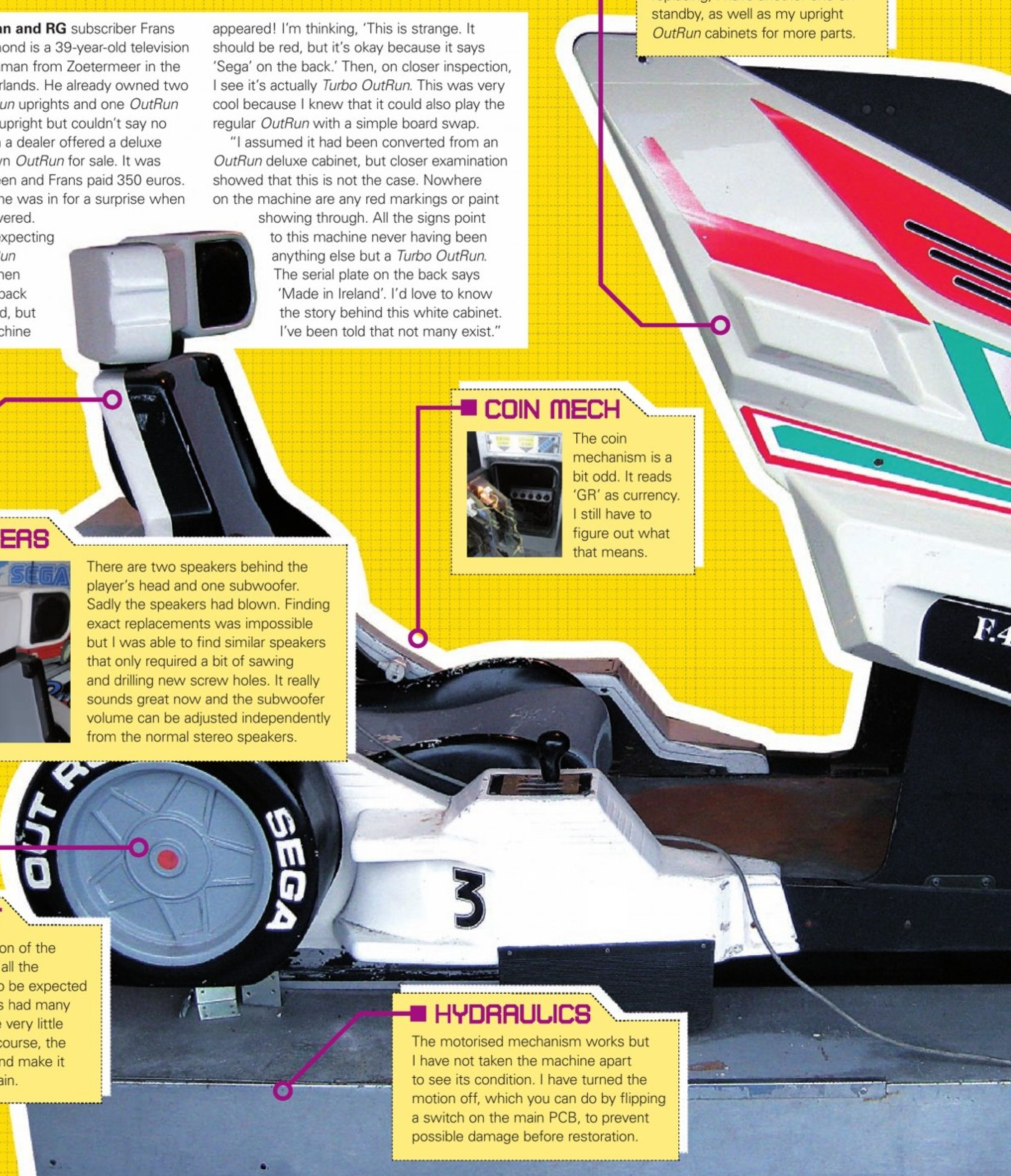
Almost nothing is known about the white Turbo OutRun deluxe machine. Luckily, one of our readers actually owns this unique cab



OutRun **fan and RG** subscriber Frans van Egmond is a 39-year-old television cameraman from Zoetermeer in the Netherlands. He already owned two *OutRun* uprights and one *OutRun* mini-upright but couldn't say no when a dealer offered a deluxe sit-down *OutRun* for sale. It was sold unseen and Frans paid 350 euros. However, he was in for a surprise when it was delivered.

"I was expecting a red *OutRun* machine when the truck's back door opened, but a white machine appeared! I'm thinking, 'This is strange. It should be red, but it's okay because it says 'Sega' on the back.' Then, on closer inspection, I see it's actually *Turbo OutRun*. This was very cool because I knew that it could also play the regular *OutRun* with a simple board swap.

"I assumed it had been converted from an *OutRun* deluxe cabinet, but closer examination showed that this is not the case. Nowhere on the machine are any red markings or paint showing through. All the signs point to this machine never having been anything else but a *Turbo OutRun*. The serial plate on the back says 'Made in Ireland'. I'd love to know the story behind this white cabinet. I've been told that not many exist."



MONITOR

The monitor still has vibrant colours but needs some width adjustments – the picture is not filling the screen completely. Should it need replacing, I have another one on standby, as well as my upright *OutRun* cabinets for more parts.

COIN MECH

The coin mechanism is a bit odd. It reads 'GR' as currency. I still have to figure out what that means.

SPEAKERS



There are two speakers behind the player's head and one subwoofer. Sadly the speakers had blown. Finding exact replacements was impossible but I was able to find similar speakers that only required a bit of sawing and drilling new screw holes. It really sounds great now and the subwoofer volume can be adjusted independently from the normal stereo speakers.

CABINET

The general condition of the machine is fair and all the damaged bits are to be expected for a machine that's had many years of use. I have very little spare time but, of course, the idea is to fix it up and make it look really good again.

HYDRAULICS

The motorised mechanism works but I have not taken the machine apart to see its condition. I have turned the motion off, which you can do by flipping a switch on the main PCB, to prevent possible damage before restoration.

CONTROL PANEL

The dashboard was badly damaged in the corner and brown tape had been applied to hold it together. I was able to find a new old-stock dashboard on the internet and bought that. The turbo button is new, having come with the replacement dashboard. The gearshift has rusted, though, but I have a couple of spare shifters and also another steering wheel assembly should I need parts.



PCB



The PCB is identical to the regular *OutRun* PCB apart from some ROMs and a security chip. The security chip is quite nasty, as it contains a battery. On the PCB are encrypted ROMs and inside the security chip is some RAM holding the decryption key. Once the battery runs out, the RAM goes empty and the game loses functionality or stops playing completely. This had me worried no end. Searching the internet I found the wonderful **www.segaresurrection.com**. I sent off my chips and I received decrypted chips in return. Those are now on the PCB and work like a charm.

developer Q&A

We speak to Alan Laird, part of the team given the unenviable task of converting the OutRun games to the Spectrum



How did you get into games development?
My school friend Ian Morrison and I had been playing around with computers since around 1979. We would play whatever games we could get hold of and before long we were writing our own, first in BASIC then in assembly. Then the bedroom development scene kicked off and it was a natural progression to get into it.

How did Ian and yourself share responsibilities? Did he do the coding and you do the graphics, or was there more of a crossover?
We both coded. Ian tended to do the 3D calculation part of the game, the stuff that would now be called the physics engine, and I did more of the on-screen rendering, but there were many tasks that we shared.

The *OutRun* licence must have filled you with dread because the coin-op was so fast and graphically rich. How did you even begin to approach it?
It was daunting, but bear in mind that this wasn't the first [racing game] we'd done. First there was *Nightmare Rally* for Ocean. Off the back of that we got the contract to convert *Enduro Racer* for Activision, and off the back of that Probe contacted us about *OutRun*. The games got more sophisticated as we went, so it was always a progression, building on the most recent one.

Were driving games a particular area of interest, or just where the work was?
We were both into real cars and bikes by then so we were also interested in driving games. The car in *Nightmare Rally* was based on my own car at the time, having been drawn from photographs we took of it in a deserted car park one night.

We take it your car was a Ford Escort XR3i, then?
Indeed it was. The most bang that could be had for your buck in 1985. I completely lived up to the stereotype of the XR3i driver and wrapped it round a lamp post during the making of *Nightmare Rally*.

The Spectrum version of *OutRun* looks similar to the arcade version, but obviously plays much slower. Did you ever consider trading off the other way, by losing visual detail to increase the speed?
Yes, constantly. The final version is its traded-off form. You'll notice that the preview graphics and artwork on the packaging have much higher density as they were based on earlier prototypes, or in some cases just completely made up by the graphic artist. We started out wanting to produce the same experience as the arcade but bit by bit it was scaled back. The end result was the best trade-off between speed and visual impact that we could achieve. I can still remember the hit on frame rate when you entered the 'tunnel' on one of the early stages.

How did you manage to ramp up the frame rate?
It was a combination of upgrades everywhere, from calculations to the screen drawing. We had a crude profiling system that would show us which parts of the program were taking up the most time and the frame rate. We never stopped learning tricks to extract the last ounce out of the Z80.

Did you have any reservations about working on the sequel?
We really wanted to produce something that ran more like the arcade game, so we were quite keen on it. More money was also nice. There was also *OutRun Europa* somewhere in there, but I can't remember if it was before or after *Turbo OutRun*.

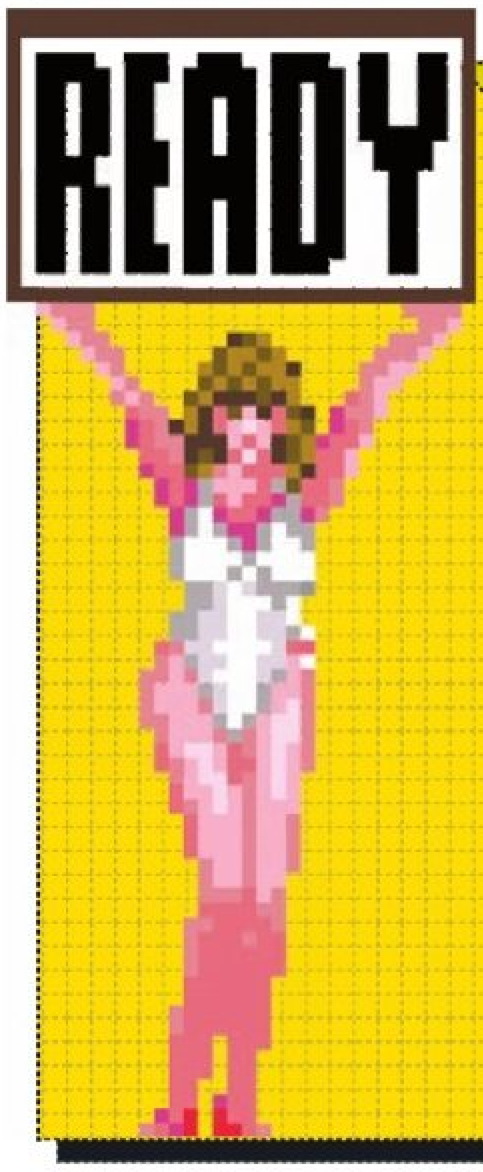


***OutRun Europa* has been a long-standing mystery to Speccy fans. There seem to be several iterations of the game, with the first being previewed by *Your Sinclair* before *Turbo OutRun* was announced.**
The first version was the only one I was involved with. I remember the graphics of the bus, taxi and 2CV. I recall spending time on it, and there probably was some coding done. I'm pretty sure the *Europa* graphics were inserted into the *OutRun* engine and a start made on the courses. Our relationship with Probe ended after *Turbo OutRun*, so we weren't involved in the final version of *Europa*.

Looking back, how pleased are you with your conversions of the *OutRun* games?
I was pleased that we managed to produce something that captured the look of the originals, but if I was a member of the public I'd probably be disappointed with the gameplay. The reviews at the time were a bit soft on us, I thought. Of course, with more time we could have done better, but we were always on tight deadlines to get them in the shops for Christmas. In the case of *OutRun* I ended up spending a couple of weeks in Probe's offices in Croydon at the start of December, finishing it off and tracking down the last bugs.

Finally, what are you up to these days?
I still write software, except now it's automated trading software for an investment bank. It was one of the ones that lost spectacular amounts of money recently, but I don't think it was due to my bugs! At home I recently put a Spectrum emulator on my Mac and my kids spent a few hours playing some of my games. It was a very proud moment. ✱

COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions



Sadly, the vast majority of home conversions for Sega's Turbo OutRun ranged from average to abominable. Here's the entire selection, so you can decide which version trails at the back of the pack and which deserves pole position





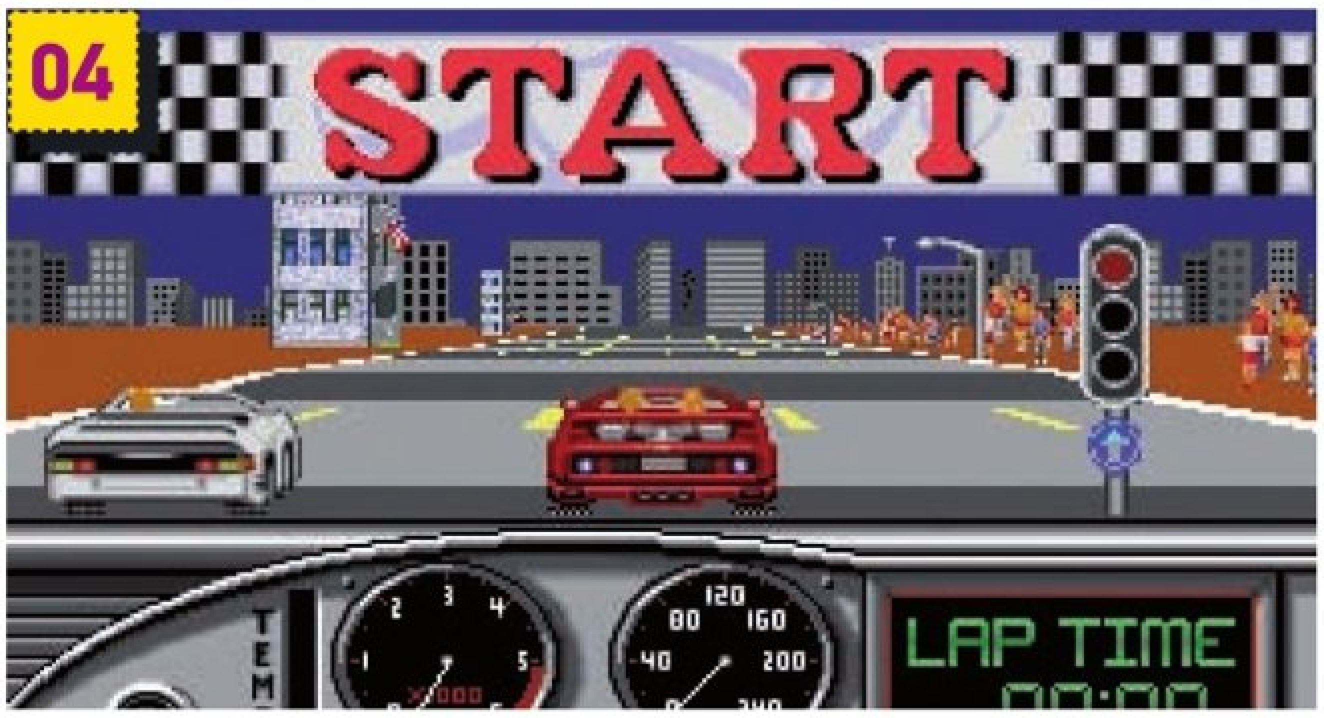


01. Commodore 64 (Best Version)
Now this is really quite something. The 16-bit versions certainly have the look of *Turbo OutRun*, but when it comes down to authentic gameplay they left a lot to be desired. Fortunately Mark Kelly and Steve Crow threw caution to the wind and somehow managed to emulate the 'feel' of the arcade original. It's an astonishing effort – especially when you consider the 8-bit limitations of the machine – and it's for that reason alone that we're making it our choice conversion, even though it looks nowhere near as authentic as the conversion we're going to look at next.

02. FM Towns Marty
This impressive effort is so close to the original arcade experience that we almost didn't include it, as it doesn't seem fair on the lesser machines. It takes a little time to load, but this is an amazingly faithful conversion of the arcade original. It boasts the same chunky visuals, wonderfully smooth scrolling – although it doesn't match the blistering speed of its arcade parent – and a truly superb soundtrack, which eventually appeared on the 11-CD *OutRun 20th Anniversary Box*. In short, it's a great conversion and the only home version that comes anywhere near to emulating the arcade original. But then we'd expect nothing less from a 32-bit machine, which is the only reason why it hasn't grabbed our best conversion spot.

03. Amstrad CPC
After the dismal release of *OutRun*, most CPC owners weren't expecting great things from US Gold's follow-up. Luckily, *Turbo OutRun* proved to be a pretty good proposition on the humble Arnold, and while it wasn't quite up to the standards of the astonishingly good Commodore 64 version, it just manages to get the edge over the ZX Spectrum offering. Graphically it's bright and colourful, and it handles pretty well and even moves at a reasonable pace. It's a world away from the high-speed thrills and spills of the arcade original, but it remains a surprisingly adequate racer for Amstrad's machine.

04. PC
We quite like the PC port of *Turbo OutRun*. Being able to toggle the turbo on and off takes some of the skill out of the game, and it has a completely different shop compared to the other versions, but it still plays really well. There's some nice handling, smart-looking visuals, a reasonable soundtrack that doesn't play in-game, and it's good fun to play. As with other versions it suffers from a rather sluggish pace, especially when compared directly to its arcade parent, but it's nevertheless a smart little racer, which, like all the other conversions – unless, of course, you're talking about *Turbo OutRun* on the











Mega Drive – manages to greatly improve upon the previous *OutRun* ports.

05. ZX Spectrum

Alan Laird doesn't think his Spectrum conversion was as good as it could have been, but we remember being pretty wowed by it back in 1989. Take off the rose-tinted spectacles, however, and it's clear to see that the Spectrum version is, like its Amstrad brethren, best described as an average attempt at emulating the hit coin-op. It still looks rather nice in a way that monochromatic Spectrum games always seem to do, but the scrolling is extremely juddery and, also like the Amstrad offering, there's no real sense of speed. It certainly feels like a better conversion when placed against its more powerful 16-bit cousins, but it's still not a patch on the glorious C64 offering.

06. Atari ST

The Atari ST version is probably our favourite one of the 16-bit ports, but that's not really high praise, as pretty much all the efforts from the time are average to pathetic. It's the lack of speed that kills this particular version, along with the choppy frame rate, miserable sound and the loading that appears at the start of each new stage. As with many of the versions of *Turbo OutRun* that we've looked at here, it's a perfectly acceptable little racer, providing you ignore the fact that it's based on an actual arcade coin-op.

07. Amiga

If you're looking for a slightly better version of the Atari ST game from the Amiga, prepare for disappointment. US Gold's Amiga port feels like more or less a direct port of the Atari ST game, and as a result shares pretty much all the same issues. The sound feels a little meatier and the palette appears a bit brighter, but to our eyes the frame rate was poorer than the Atari offering. As with many of the featured versions, it's a decent racer; it's just unable to emulate the gut-wrenching thrills of its arcade parent.

08. Mega Drive (Worst Version)

You'd expect Sega's own Mega Drive port of *Turbo OutRun* to be good, wouldn't you? Sadly, this isn't the case here, and while the visuals take a decent stab at capturing the spirit of the original arcade game, the scrolling itself is absolutely atrocious. Yes, it's blindingly fast, but it's at the expense of a smooth frame rate, which turns the whole thing into a stuttering, headache-inducing mess.

This in itself is pretty bad, but the weak audio, sloppy collision detection and generally spongy controls turn this into a complete abomination of a game that sort of looks like the popular arcade game in static screenshots, but certainly doesn't feel like it once you get down to the all-important playing. Truly disappointing.

» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURAMACHINA

#4 Fujitsu FM Towns Marty



JUST THE FACTS

The FM Towns range was named after 1964 Nobel Prize in Physics Charles Hard Townes. The 'e' was dropped because in Japanese, Townes is pronounced 'Tau-Ness'.

The joystick port on the Marty is a DB9 connector – the same as the one seen on the Amiga, Sega Master System and Sega Mega Drive.

Many believed that the Marty 2 contained superior hardware, including a 486 processor. However, recent work by enthusiasts has proven that the machine is essentially a Marty MK1 in a different coloured case.

A mouse was released for the Marty that allowed for greater control over the many PC-style adventures available on the format.

The Marty cannot output in RGB. Unless your television is capable of accepting an S-Video connection, you're out of luck.

Some Marty titles – like *Splatterhouse* – offered the ability to run the game in different resolutions.

CSK Research Institute supported the FM Towns with conversions of Sega's arcade hits such as *After Burner* and *Galaxy Force*. The former is backwards compatible with the Marty.

UK studio Psygnosis was another big FM Towns supporter, and released *Shadow Of The Beast*, *Microcosm* and *Scavenger 4* (aka *Novastorm*) on the system.

The abject failure of both the Marty and Marty 2 apparently led to the creation of the Japanese business term 'Marty's Law', which states that if you don't keep offering something to sell, you can't boost sales. Obvious, really.

The super-rare Car Marty came in two variants: the MVP-1 (April 1994) and MVP-10 (November 1994). The latter was apparently produced because the drive in the former was prone to failure.



» Ving's port of *Splatterhouse* is fantastic, and commands high prices.

Japanese PC manufacturer Fujitsu isn't a company you'd necessarily associate with innovation in the videogame industry, so it might come as some surprise to learn that this firm is responsible for launching the world's first ever 32-bit console. That machine was the Marty, an off-shoot of Fujitsu's FM Towns personal computer range and one of the most sought-after pieces of Japanese gaming hardware in the world.

"The original FM Towns computer was based around a modified Cyrix 80386SX 32-bit CPU and was released in February 1989," reveals expert Eric Chung. "It was the first Japanese PC to come with a CD-ROM drive as a standard." Right from the start, the format was earmarked for gaming greatness, thanks largely to its unique hardware. "Unlike the competing PC-98 series, the FM Towns possessed formidable (for the time) video and audio functionalities, with native sprite capabilities and with six-channel FM/8 channel PCM sound."

Released in 1993, The FM Towns Marty was supposed to capitalise on the success of the burgeoning console industry. It boasted CD-ROM technology and betrayed its home computer roots by also packing a 3.5-inch floppy drive. The Marty was advertised as being fully backwards compatible with existing FM Towns software, although this didn't turn out to be the case. "Out of the 700 or so titles released on the FM Towns, only around 250 are fully compatible with the Marty," says Chung. Despite this, the Marty was gifted with some truly amazing arcade conversions. Faithful ports of Namco's *Splatterhouse* and Toaplan shooters *Tatsujin-Ou* and *Ultimate Tiger/Twin Cobra* made the console highly desirable to coin-op addicts at a time when current hardware – such as the Mega Drive and SNES – simply wasn't up to hosting perfect conversions.

Alongside the Marty, Fujitsu also produced the Car Marty, a variant of the console intended for installation in automobiles. "At the time, it was widely lauded as being one of the first GPS systems with the ability to plot multiple routes to a destination," Chung explains. "With the use of the optional 3.5-inch floppy drive, users could save routes and other information for future searches." Astonishingly, despite this versatility, the Marty wasn't a commercial success. The first problem was the cost of the platform. "Priced initially at 99,800 yen, it was clearly above traditional game consoles, yet it lacked the functionality of its PC competitors that were priced from 100,000 yen and upwards," laments Chung. "In 1994, Fujitsu released the Marty 2, which did not contain any hardware upgrades but lowered the price down to 66,000 yen – still more than



In our continuing quest to bring you lost treasures from the vaults of retro gaming, Damien McFerran delves into the history of the world's first 32-bit CD-ROM console

the cutting-edge Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation."

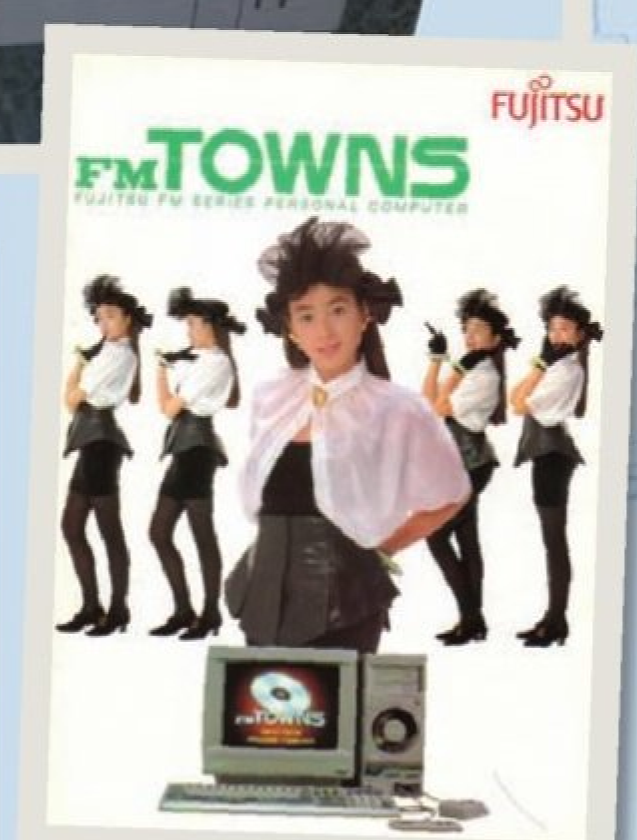
Another big problem was the functionality of the Marty, which was noticeably worse than that of its computer sibling. "Besides not being compatible with nearly two-thirds of the FM Towns software, the Marty suffered from a number of downgrades from the original hardware," continues Chung. "It contained a down-scan converter which turned the VGA output into S-video with no option for RGB. Also, the console's 386 CPU was the weakest out of the FM Towns line and the equivalent Towns PCs sold in 1993 were already equipped with 486s." Infuriatingly, the design of the Marty didn't allow for future upgrades or expandability, which caused problems as the standard of FM Towns software slowly evolved. "The console had 2MB of RAM which was not upgradable," continues Chung. "This resulted in limited software performance, and meant that later games such as Capcom's *Super Street Fighter II* – which required 4MB of memory – would not function on the Marty."

The types of games being released on the Marty also had a bearing on its overall retail performance. Although some killer coin-op conversions were available, the vast majority of titles could trace their ancestry back to Western personal computers – hardly a surprise when you consider that the architecture was PC-based.

"The majority of titles available were developed by Western houses such as Origin, LucasArts and Psygnosis, and were obviously not to Japanese tastes," says Chung. "Home developers like CSK, Ving and Capcom converted Japanese arcade titles but there were too few to capture the mainstream gaming audience. PC developer mainstays like Koei and Falcom focused on the better-selling PC-98, which led to fewer releases for the FM Towns range. Interestingly enough, Sony instructed Psygnosis to use the FM Towns as a learning ground for CD-based games and they subsequently used that knowledge on the PlayStation after dropping support for Fujitsu's machines."

These days, thanks to its relative scarcity and unique selection of games, the Marty – along with its close relation, the FM Towns – remains a solid favourite for hoarders of Japanese hardware. "The FM Towns is a tough platform to collect for as the number of copies produced for each title is already much smaller than other PC platforms, and there are few places even in Japan which carry used games," reveals Chung. "Ironically enough, the Western games that Japanese gamers didn't warm to are exactly the titles which collectors, especially those overseas, are searching for. Origin and LucasArts' titles for the platform are often the best versions available and are bilingual. For example, *Zak McKracken* uses 256 colours, is fully voiced and contains an arranged redbook soundtrack. *Ultima VI* is fully bilingual with voice acting – some by Richard Garriot himself. Due to this, Western collectors are often seeking out the FM Towns versions, which has reduced supply and driven some titles into the $300 range." If you're thinking of taking up FM Towns or Marty collecting, make sure you have the patronage of an oil baron beforehand.





» This advert for the FM Towns computer bills it as a 'Hyper Media PC'.



» The Car Marty – also known as MVP-1 – was an early example of a GPS Sat-Nav device.

PERFECT THREE



TATSUJIN-OU

Also known as *Truxton II*, the prequel to this game was converted to the Sega Mega Drive and PC Engine. Toaplan's shooters are always in demand with collectors, and *Tatsujin-Ou* is no exception.



SPLATTERHOUSE

Often hailed by many as the Marty's killer app, Ving's port of Namco's famous arcade *Splatterhouse* title is nothing short of stunning. It's also ridiculously expensive these days, too, of course.



ULTIMA VI

Ultima creator Richard 'Lord British' Garriot worked closely with Fujitsu to ensure that this PC port of his game would be as authentic as possible. He even lent his voice to the game.

Thanks go to Eric Chung for taking the time to participate in this feature, and to David Coyles for making it all possible

DRUID

Firebird's popular fantasy shoot-'em-up was deservedly one of the company's biggest full-price hits. Mike Bevan talks to creators Andrew Bailey and Dene Carter and discovers how the game put a spanner in the works of US Gold's official Gauntlet conversions

Released in 1986, *Druid* cast players in the role of the eponymous purple-hoodied wizard, tasked with destroying four skull-like demons hidden across eight large multi-directional scrolling levels. With an armoury of elemental magic, a computer-controlled Golem protector (which could also be controlled by a second player), a bestiary of mythical nasties and dozens of maze-like corridors to explore, *Druid* was in many ways a more atmospheric and intriguing experience than the official 8-bit *Gauntlet* ports that arrived later that same year.

"Andrew and I met at a horrible school in Portsmouth," remembers Dene Carter, co-designer and graphic artist on *Druid* and *Enlightenment: Druid II*. "He was a year or so above me, and had already released a couple of games. I'd just developed and released a little game called *Rockman* and saw him running one of his Ozzy games in our computer labs. We got talking and found that we had similar attitudes to various things. We also complemented each other quite







» [C64] Different creatures have different elemental weaknesses. These demons are highly susceptible to electricity.

"I think I wiped out all the graphics and fonts twice and had to create them from scratch!"







IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** FIREBIRD SOFTWARE
- » **DEVELOPER:** ANDREW BAILEY, DENE CARTER
- » **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI 400/800
- » **RELEASED:** 1986
- » **GENRE:** ACTION RPG / SHOOT-'EM-UP



well. Andrew wanted to improve his graphics a bit, and my coding skills weren't quite up to the task of producing the RPG game I had begun working on for the ZX Spectrum. It seemed a perfect match."

"My first commercial game was called *Mars Lander*, and was in C64 BASIC," says Andrew Bailey, co-designer and coder for the *Druid* series. "A friend and myself actually produced the tape cassettes and sold them to the local store. That didn't pan out so my next couple of games (*Headache* and *Demons Of Topaz*) were sold to Firebird. After that Dene and I got together to work on *Druid*."

The RPG-style game Dene had been working on would become a crucial stepping stone in *Druid*'s development. "I'd started coding a Spectrum top-down adventure game inspired by the dungeon floor-plan tiles I saw in the back of *White Dwarf* magazine," he explains. "There were cobbles, statues, walls and all sorts of things you could plonk together to make representative layouts of classic Dungeons & Dragons environments. I thought: 'Hmm... surely a computer could do that better.'

"Based on early tests, a pure top-down graphical approach looked ugly and confusing. What does a cup look like from above? A circle and a line. In eight-by-eight pixels that's just a badly drawn circle! There just wasn't sufficient visual information to make objects recognisable. We were a bit stumped. I think we both saw *Gauntlet* for the first time around this point and saw that Atari had solved that problem by bevelling the walls and tipping the whole view by just a tiny amount: enough to make the characters and monsters a little bit more recognisable."

"As the Commodore 64 was the machine I worked on, the game naturally moved to that platform," continues Andrew. "Some of the design decisions were made to adapt to that machine, like the number of screen nasties, the colouring and wave formations." *Druid* was Andrew's first eight-way scrolling game, so the scroll routine was one of the first aspects to be completed. "From this a map editor was made," he says. "This allowed Dene to start on background art and maps. The C64 used a character-based render method, rather than the Spectrum's bitmap screen, so the game used a method called matrices, which were four-by-four grids of characters, and a map was simply an array of these. This was how the maps were all squashed into 64K. It meant the maps were built out of lots of similar pieces rather than drawn, but for dungeons this was just fine."

"Regarding gameplay, Andrew and I had a disagreement early on," Dene admits. "I wanted all the



THE DRUID'S PATH

DESPITE THE SUCCESS of *Druid*, Dene Carter tells us that pitching the game to other companies didn't go quite as well as with eventual publisher Firebird. "At the time, one of the most prestigious publishers was Hewson Consultants," he says. "My dad drove us both up to Oxfordshire to see the director, who proceeded to criticise our game enormously and then tell us he wasn't at **all interested in it. Some time after, when the game hit number one, I met him at a show and he** generously told me that he had frequently kicked himself for that decision."

"Another interesting titbit is that when we did *Druid II* we also decided later on that we wanted a version for the Commodore Amiga," says producer Tony Beckwith. "Andrew introduced me to a **business software company called Taurus Impex who wanted to get into videogame** development. The two guys he introduced me to were Les Edgar and Peter Molyneux. They went on to form Bullfrog and the rest is history. Porting *Druid II* to the Amiga was a valuable learning lesson for Peter and got him to where he is today. It was one of those seminal moments."

DRUID





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BOOTY
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, C64, CPC
YEAR: 1984

REBELSTAR
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, CPC
YEAR: 1986

I, BALL (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, C64, CPC
YEAR: 1987

ENLIGHTENMENT: DRUID II
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM, C64, CPC
YEAR: 1986

"We actually had the game pulled from several areas of the US Bible Belt"

» *Druid*'s eye-catching cover art caused some consternation in certain overtly Christian areas of the US…



creatures to be persistent. When they died, that was it, they were gone. Andrew pointed out that it would probably make the game exceedingly boring as your dungeon became progressively emptier, and suggested that the baddies should just spawn, keeping players on their toes."

Dene also concedes that he had a few minor scuffles with the hardware during development. "I'm not sure how Andrew put up with me," he laughs. "I think I wiped out all the graphics and fonts twice and had to create them from scratch. I also kept animating creatures with the arms and legs going in the same direction, like the 'I Can't Dance' video!"

One of the most charming aspects of the game, and perhaps its signature feature, is the ability to create a Golem helper. Through simple commands this creature can be instructed to doggedly follow its master, attack monsters, or guard a single area of the map. The capacity for a second player to jump into the role of Golem also adds a highly enjoyable co-operative twist.

"The Golem idea came from a kids' arts and crafts book called *Make Your Own Monster*," Dene recalls. "The book gave little bits of back-story for the creatures. I was really taken with the idea of the golem: a clay homunculus given life by a powerful sorcerer – I felt it was somehow a similar magic to making software. We also wanted to ensure the game worked for both single and paired players, and thought having the Druid summon a familiar was a good way to involve a second player without unbalancing the game."

"When Andrew first got the Golem's remarkably sophisticated AI working we had a surprising amount of fun playing 'lose the Golem and see how long it takes him to creep up on you'," Dene laughs. "Despite the navigation not being as sophisticated as modern algorithms, it always managed to find its way back."

One aspect of *Druid* didn't go down quite so well as planned after the game's US release, as Dene amusingly recounts. "The idea for the main antagonists – the demon princes – came from a reaction I had to pictures in a Steve Jackson *Fighting Fantasy* bestiary," he says. "The book showed demons as dragon-like beings, and I thought that wasn't anywhere near scary enough. I was hugely taken with skull imagery and medieval death-masks at the time and decided that demons should be horned skulls. We actually had the game pulled from several areas of the US Bible Belt due to this decision. It was all little too 'heavy metal satanist' for them. I was 16 at the time, nerdy as anything and owned a single Jean-Michel Jarre album. To be rejected on the basis of being too rock-and-roll was, frankly, hilarious and began my long-term intolerance toward the religious right."

Publisher Firebird was hugely enthusiastic about the game, however, as Tony Beckwith, former head of new product evaluation at Telecomsoft, reveals. "One game that came through one day in a package from Dene and Andrew was their game *Druid* on the C64," he tells us. "Back in those days, 'bedroom coders' would submit near-finished games to publishers for evaluation for publication. We used to get a lot of rubbish sent in so the job of product evaluation could get quite

SOUND OF THE UNDERGROUND

***DRUID*'S ATMOSPHERIC TITLE music was composed by another school friend of Andrew** and Dene's, David Hanlon. "Musically, I would state my early influences as Jarre and Oldfield with some help from an old cassette of my Dad's called 'The Moog Goes Supernatural'," says David. "For the *Druid* tune I was aiming for a medieval-sounding piece; for some reason I thought that fit better with the Druidic theme. I can't recall the name of the music package I used, but I **remember the little plastic keyboard overlay that I used to input the tunes."**

"Andrew and I later collaborated with a small company in Guildford called Taurus to publish a drum machine for the Amiga called *Adrum*. Since they didn't want to use their business company name for this, we invented a new name to publish under: Bullfrog. They went on to convert the *Druid II* and *Populous* for Amiga, and I did some music and sound FX for these too, using proper sampled sounds this time and the *Adrum* engine that Andrew had written."

"With the arrival of the internet I found out that the original *Druid* tune had been used by a hacking crew and it had achieved some sort of following in its own right. I quite enjoy listening to the many excellent remixes. It was quite a weird feeling watching the YouTube vids of Reyn Ouwehand playing my tune. Through Facebook, Andy and I got in contact again and I am helping create some music for his latest *Golem Crusades* game."





» [C64] The pumpkin-like floor markings drain your life force, but their effects can be reversed with the Chaos spell.





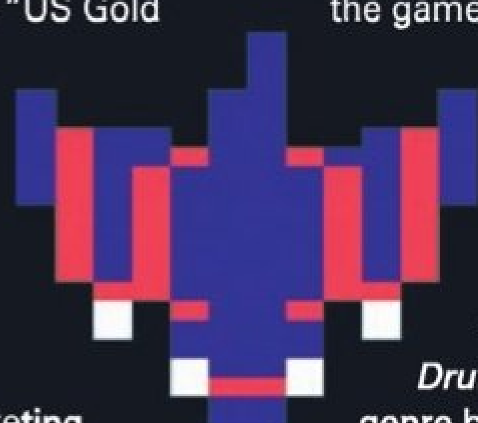
» [Atari 8-bit] The Druid makes it safely over a bridge and spies a couple of useful-looking chests.



» [C64] The Golem's 'send' command is extremely useful for clearing out rooms of nasties.

monotonous. But *Druid* really stood out. Getting that game in really brightened up my day. We instantly got in touch and did a deal with them – I believe that Dene's father was very much involved in that.

"The main thing was that *Gauntlet* was huge in the arcades at that time," Tony continues. "US Gold had secured the publishing rights for that game on home computers. They were rushing to get their versions out but we managed to pip them to the post with *Druid*. This was a marketing man's dream at the time. *Druid* was a massive success. And then when *Gauntlet* came out it was really buggy. By chance, many years later I ended up working with some people who had worked on *Gauntlet* and they told me about how they had had to rush their development because of *Druid*, and that was why their game came out with so many bugs in it."



Aside from the original C64 version, Andrew was also responsible for the Spectrum port of *Druid*. "He invented a dual joystick port cable and checksum software to allow us to port over all the graphics directly," says Dene. "I merely had to tweak the art." The popularity of the game convinced Firebird that green lighting a sequel was a no-brainer, resulting in the more RPG-oriented 1987 sequel *Enlightenment: Druid II*. "The decision to go full adventure for *Druid II* was a love of the genre by both Dene and myself," says Andrew. "It departed from a simple shoot-'em-up to something that required puzzles, finding objects and carrying them to another place, lighting tricks (one room was all black, and only a torch lit up an area directly in front of the *Druid*), and more advanced enemy spawning, like zombies coming out of the ground and trees that came to life. Also different elemental Golem types were introduced that had different strengths and weaknesses."

"I'd always wanted to create a big world with a cohesive map, along with proper quest objectives, objects to collect and the other RPG trappings we'd missed out of the first game," adds Dene. "Other interesting influences crept in. Death imagery returned in the form of the boatman – swiped from the movie *Clash Of The Titans*. The end level's eye-covered floor and creeping hand-monsters were taken from Giger art, and the transformation of landscape segments into creatures was inspired by *The Thing*."

"*Druid II* was a remarkably complex and deep game, and Andrew did an amazing job of fitting it all into a C64," continues Dene. "If I remember correctly, the game didn't do too well at retail – I was in Gibraltar by then, and rather lost touch with the industry. I imagine that the *Gauntlet* popularity wave we'd managed to ride for the first *Druid* was largely over. However, it still leaves me a little baffled that this larger, better-designed, more fulfilling game wasn't as popular as its predecessor."

Andrew also set sail for foreign shores, albeit slightly further ones. "In 1990 I got coaxed to Melbourne,



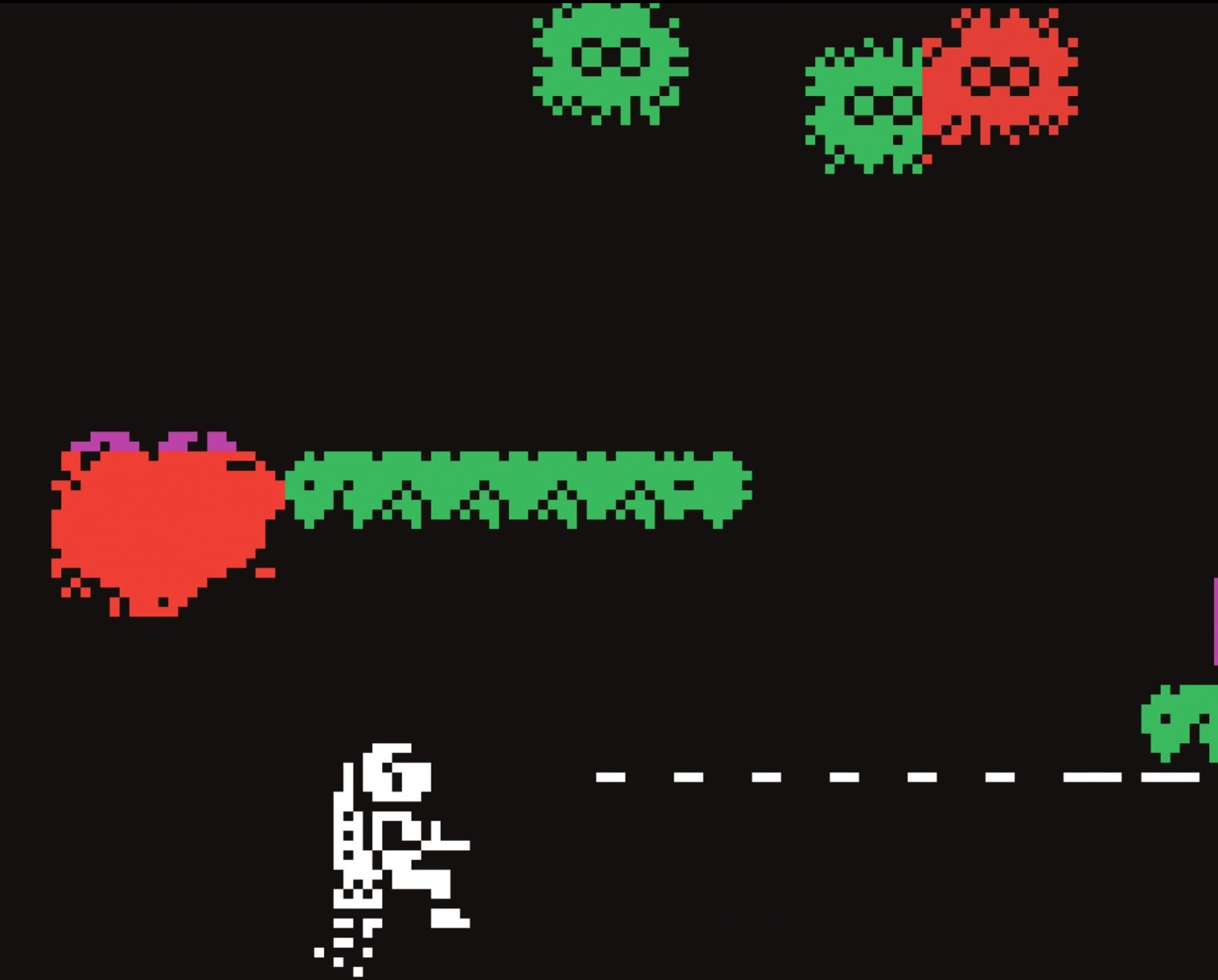
Australia, by Melbourne House of *Hobbit* and *Exploding Fist* fame," he says. "In 1994 I co-founded Tantalus Interactive which I had been Chief Technology Officer of until November 2009. I'm now in 'reboot' mode, making a new *Druid* game called *Golem Crusades*, which if *Druid* was a shoot-'em-up, *Druid II* an RPG plus shoot-'em-up, then it's an RTS plus shoot-'em-up." **RG** readers may be interested to know that the third instalment of the *Druid* saga is now available for PC at **www.golemcrusades.com**, with a companion title, *Golem Defense* for iPhone released via iTunes.

"I'm proud of the fact that we managed to create two action-RPGs at a time when this was very rare," says Dene in summary. "The *Druid* games are ridiculously hard by modern standards – but so was everything else. I went on to create *Cloud Kingdoms* for the Amiga and PC, go to university to pick up a business degree, join Bullfrog, work on *Dungeon Keeper* and then start Big Blue Box Studios, a Lionhead satellite. Big Blue Box went on to create the *Fable* franchise for Microsoft where I remained until last year. I'm now taking a bit of time to enjoy myself writing silly iPhone games like *Flaboo!* but I'm sure I'll be back in RPG world again at some point. It's in my blood…"



» [C64] Druid and Golem approach one of the four fire-spitting Demon Princes.

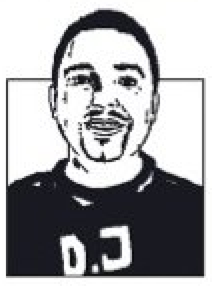




Jetpac

YOU NEVER FORGET YOUR FIRST TIME

» RETROREVIVAL



» ZX SPECTRUM
» ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
» 1983

Our Rare article from a couple of months ago upset a few readers because it had no references to Ultimate Play The Game. The truth of the matter is that Ultimate and Rare are two separate companies, despite the fact that one obviously wouldn't have existed without the other. Still, we appreciate that, for some, Rare and Ultimate will be forever linked with each other, so here's a look at the game that started the ball rolling and turned a two-brother team into one of gaming's most well-known developers.

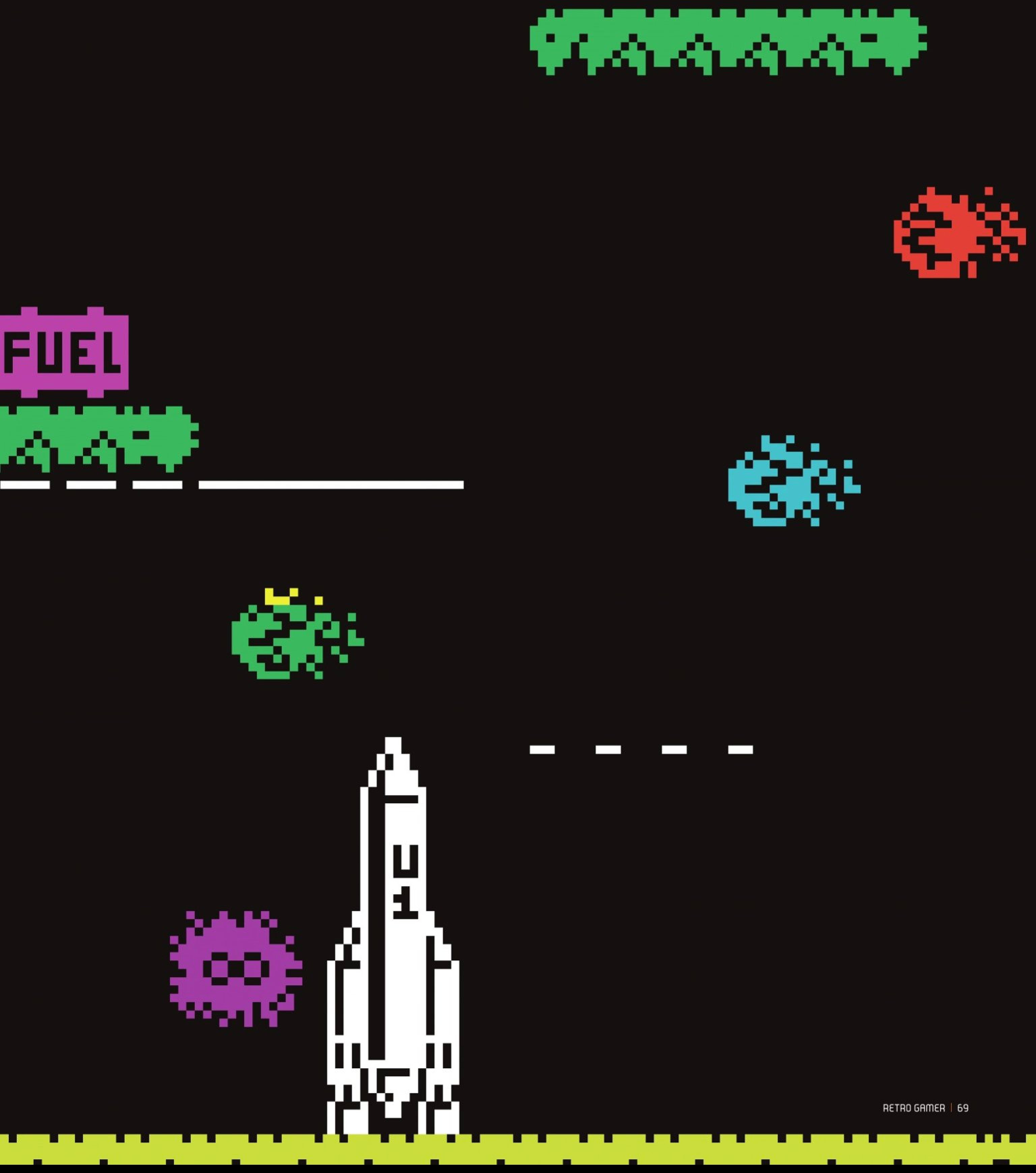
It's fair to say that for this particular ten-year-old, *Jetpac* was a revelation. I'd often pop round my friend's house and watch, bored, as he tapped out type-in programs on his ZX81; all this changed, however, when he upgraded to his Spectrum. It was like the creation of the universe.

All of a sudden, home gaming not only made sense, but could be just as good as the games I used to enjoy playing in the arcades when I was occasionally allowed to go to them – don't forget, I was still only ten.

Ultimate's *Jetpac* changed all that, as it was perfect proof that fast-paced arcade-style games were possible on seemingly crusty computers. I was hooked on the adventures of Jetman, and it would be the first game, along with the excellent *3D Deathchase*, which you'll find given its dues on page 90, that we'd load up whenever I visited Paul's house.

Even today, *Jetpac* is a wonderfully slick piece of coding. Granted, the gameplay is simple – assemble a space ship, fill it with fuel, then repeat ad nauseam – but it's so beautifully crafted and so tight that a five-minute play soon turns into an hour-long marathon. Little wonder, then, that it was the first and only game in the Ultimate back catalogue that Rare ever remade, in the form of Xbox Live Arcade's excellent *Jetpac Refuelled*.

While Jetman went on to star in several more adventures from Ultimate and Rare, nothing ever came close to his original outing for me, and it's a game that I return to again and again and again. *


FUEL
U
1



Immersive worlds and massive environments have only been made possible recently, thanks to the latest hardware advances. Or have they? Michael Reed discovers that the 8- and 16-bit platforms were a haven for early experiments in free-form 3D gaming



"Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?" – Robert Browning**

Gaming is about freedom and escape, but good game design relies on placing limits on what the player can do. *Pac-Man* can never climb over the walls of the maze, and you might as well take it as read that reinforcements are not on the way when you are playing *Space Invaders*. In other words, a game's not much fun without any rules.

By the beginning of the Eighties, though, some designers had started to experiment with giving the player a bit more freedom. This was particularly true in the context of home systems, as there was no pressure to create games that could be over quickly in order to free up a cabinet. Gamers of the time wanted thrills, but they also demonstrated an appetite for experiences that stimulated exploration and problem-solving. It was inevitable that these two styles of game would begin to converge, and games that offered the most even balance between both extremes came to be called arcade adventures.

Simultaneously, powerful hardware and the software techniques necessary to display real-time 3D graphics came into existence. Here, too, the first coin-op efforts such as *Star Wars* and *Battlezone* concentrated on offering a carefully managed experience, and again, home computer owners often wanted more than a mere reflex test. The classic standard-bearer for this approach is the space-based trading simulator *Elite*, and by becoming one of the bestselling games of the era, it had proved that the market was hungry for games that offered combat alongside exploration and free-from gameplay.

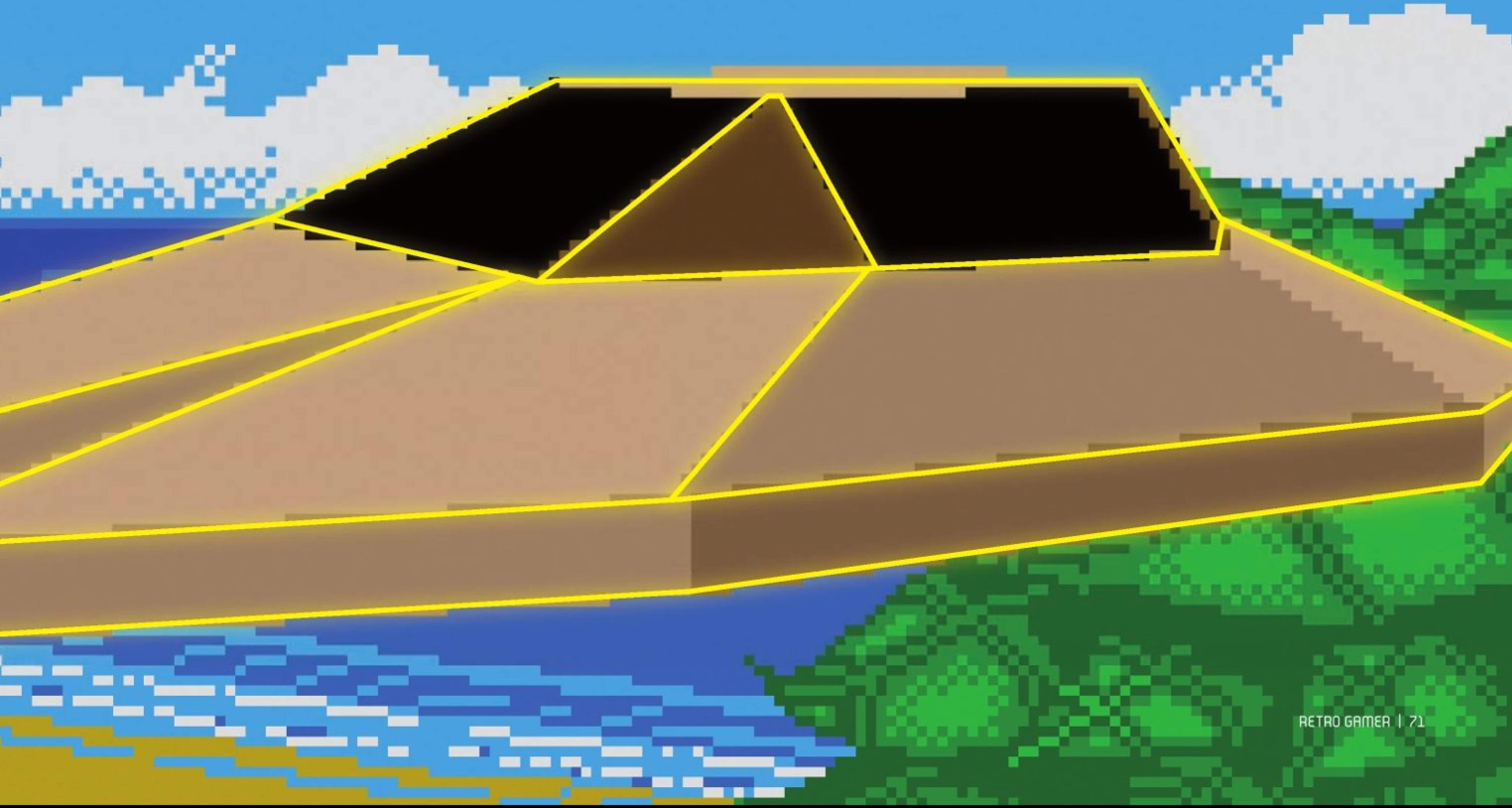
While all this was going on, scientists were beginning to see the potential for computers in the field of simulation, and at the same time, fiction had embraced the concept of what would eventually be known as virtual reality. It's fair to say that there was something of a VR boom going on in the Eighties. Back in the world of gaming, a type of arcade adventure that took place within a 3D world began to appear.

MERCENARY

The *Mercenary* series constitutes one of the most celebrated examples of the genre. The first game of the series, *Mercenary: Escape From Targ*, was released on the Atari 800XL in 1985, and it was soon ported to the other popular home computers of the time. Colourful line graphics present a first-person view into a game world that is awesome in scale. For example, the game engine not only allows the player to travel vast distances around the surface of the planet Targ, but it is even possible to pilot a flying vehicle up to a space station in a low orbit, if you know where it is. Now that's freedom.

Mercenary itself involves travelling around, making use of various vehicles and collecting clues that can be used to escape Targ. How this is done is largely left to the player, and there are a few solutions or a combination that you can use while playing off the warring factions of the planet. The freedom to act and to make moral choices highlights one of the signature aspects of the genre: they are literal role-playing games, and you define what sort of character you want to play through your actions. Confirming that it is indeed an adventure game at heart, puzzles and an object inventory play an important part in the gameplay.

16-bit conversions were made, and although the graphics were improved for these versions, they were still wireframe.



CHANGING WORLDS



» [Amiga] Exploring the cavernous indoor world of *Cybercon III*.

This changed with the first sequel to *Mercenary*, *Damocles*. It took full advantage of the graphical power of the Amiga and the ST, with flat-shaded solid graphics. If your brain was boggled by the size of the play area in the first *Mercenary* game, *Damocles* may cause your head to explode as it models an entire solar system. *Mercenary* and *Damocles* both received extra mission packs to extend them even further. The third full game in the series, *Mercenary III: The Dion Crisis*, used an improved version of the *Damocles* engine, with even more going on up in space and a greater emphasis on character interaction, while maintaining the wry Anglophile humour of the earlier instalments. A PC version was far enough along for some screenshots to emerge, but it was abandoned in 1995.

CHOLO

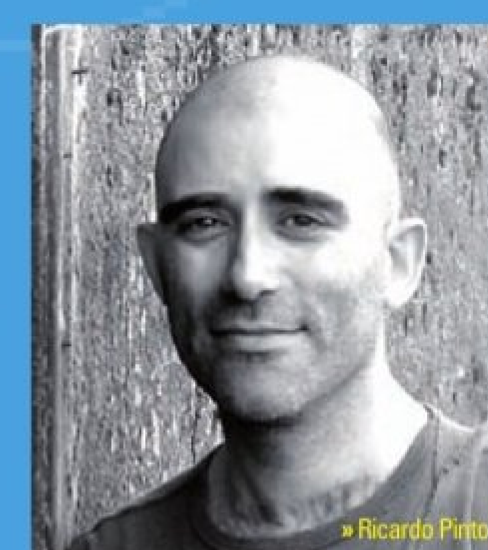
Cholo (1986) is a game that combines a large open world with a dense, foreboding atmosphere. The gameplay itself offers some action but also includes a strong puzzle element. As explained by the novella included with the game, the player takes remote control of a series of robots up on the surface of a futuristic Earth that has been ravaged by nuclear war. This scenario is clever, as it makes the first-person perspective and the grainy line graphics seem plausible, as they are a remote view being transmitted from a robot.

In the game, robots have been left in autonomous control and comprise the sparse population of the city, which makes up the play area. The robots exhibit fairly complex behaviour patterns, so that when you get too close they may take an interest in you or they might make a run for it. It's essential to gain control of these robots, often by entering abandoned buildings and hacking into computers to find the control password, as each class of robot has a unique set of capabilities. Some can fly, some are rugged combat platforms, one is a transport boat, and there are many others.

Like *Mercenary*, *Cholo* is a game in which you can go anywhere, within reason. Joey Headen, who developed *Cholo* alongside Glyn Williams, explains: "Once we had a renderer that could do rotations around all three axes, it meant the gameplay could take place anywhere. The camera, and therefore the player, could go anywhere, so why restrict the player to certain paths?"

One of the difficulties in developing 3D games at that time was the lack of modern development tools. "The map was four large sheets of graph paper taped together. As there was no 3D modelling software like 3DS Max or Maya available to us, all the buildings and the robots were sketched out on graph paper with their co-ordinates for each vertex marked on them," recalled Joey. "The first time we saw either the terrain or the objects in the world was in-game, using our own engine. On the other hand, we had the freedom to do whatever we wanted as 3D was completely new and people had no fixed expectations."





» Ricardo Pinto

» [Amiga] Up on the surface in *Infestation*.









Cholo was later ported to the other popular 8-bit platforms of the day. The guys did have a plan for a fresh 16-bit follow-up, but by the time they were ready to work on it, Glyn had moved back to Sheffield to form Particle Systems, which would go on to develop the *I-War* series of space simulators.

CYBERCON III

From the beginning, *Cybercon III* designer Ricardo Pinto saw the potential of 3D computer games: "It struck me almost immediately that the true potential of computer games did not lie in sprites but in 3D graphics. Not that I have anything against sprite-driven games, but we live in a 3D environment, so if you really want to draw someone into a virtual world, it has to be a 3D one."

In his career, he made contributions to other 3D games such as *Gyron*, *The Hive*, *Starglider* and *Carrier Command*, but *Cybercon III* was Ricardo's final entry into the canon of 3D arcade adventure games. It combines flat-shaded graphics and shooting action with puzzle-based gameplay that takes place within a mixture of corridors and cavernous areas.

Ricardo remembers how he first became involved: "A friend of mine, Andy Beveridge, one of the founders of The Assembly Line, asked me to help save them from a disaster. He had developed a remarkably powerful 3D engine, but at that stage had no actual game, and when I joined them, the game consisted of running around a convention centre with desks and tables. I turned that into *Cybercon III*. Part of the inspiration for that was *Tron* – the original film – with its Light Cycles racing along canyons. My design pushed the 3D engine to its limits. I wanted to be able to constantly see other spaces at a distance that you would only get to much later in the game."

"We had the freedom to do whatever we wanted as 3D was completely new"

The finished game was a technical tour de force, with amazing depth. On the negative side, players found the level of difficulty extremely challenging, and it featured a control system that would intimidate flight sim enthusiasts. Ricardo also drew attention to a difference that existed in the development culture of the time – and this is a point that you'll hear time and time again when talking to industry insiders from this era: as there were no prima donna celebrity developers, deadlines were, for better or worse, set by the publishers and were immovable.

"We were so tied up with the technical challenges that there was not much time to massage the gameplay," he laments. "This, alas, was the problem with many of the projects I worked on and most of those I heard about: all the time available was consumed making the game work at all – then it was time to release it."

Ricardo subsequently left the industry and now works as a fantasy novelist.

Infestation (1990, Psygnosis) isn't as well known as it should be, as it offers one of the most fully realised 3D worlds on an Amiga game. The bulk of the adventure takes place below the surface of the planet, and it's here that you'll discover the equipment you need to complete your mission. *The Colony* (1991, Mindscape) is another little-known entry to the genre. It could have been another *Cholo*, but it was marred by overly difficult combat sections that meant that few got to partake in much actual exploration.

Midwinter was released to great acclaim in 1990 for the ST, Amiga and PC. It employs a futuristic, post-apocalyptic storyline to set up the action. In it, a new ice age has reshaped

Replaying the classics

SO, HOW WELL have these games aged? The truth is that, thanks to incredible advances in the hardware, 3D graphics are the main area in which modern games have improved. That means that the games covered here often have graphics that are difficult to make out, with frame rates that seriously begin to impact on playability.

The control system can also be a bit irksome to players who are used to modern games. Back in the early years of interactive 3D games, programmers were still trying to work out how the player should interact with the 3D environment. Over the course of about 20 years, game developers have established a set of conventions for ergonomic player and camera movement.

However, many of these games absolutely trounce the generation that followed them in terms of player freedom, complex gameplay and interactive environments.



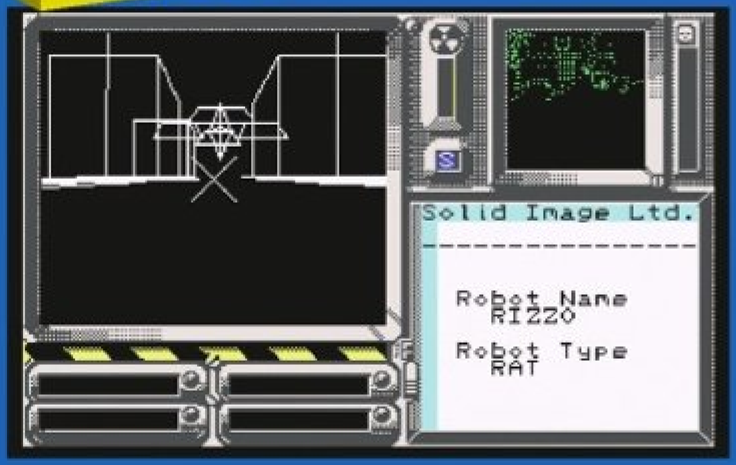
SIX OF THE BEST



MIDWINTER II: FLAMES OF FREEDOM

Year: 1991
Publisher: Rainbird/MicroProse
Developer: Maelstrom

■ Action meets strategy and exploration in a game that's even bigger than the original. This time around, the fractal-generated map and terrain are even more detailed, and you now control a single character with RPG-style stats.



CHOLO

Year: 1986
Publisher: Firebird
Developer: Solid Image Ltd

■ This classic adventure boasts an oppressive atmosphere so thick that you'd need a laser blaster to penetrate it. A range of automated robot defences and some logical puzzles stand between you and regaining control of the surface of the planet for the humans trapped underground after a nuclear war.



3D CONSTRUCTION KIT

Year: 1991
Publisher: Domark
Developer: Incentive Software

■ Not actually a game but a game design tool that's as much fun as most games. Ever wanted to create your own virtual world? Make your own games, simulations or visualisations, or simply plan out your dream house – but with trap doors and tricky puzzles.



HUNTER

Year: 1991
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Paul Holmes

■ The third-person view and the open-ended gameplay on offer in *Hunter* add up to something that plays like a sort of prototypical 3D *Grand Theft Auto* game as you drive around in a wide range of vehicles and explore buildings throughout the game world. But with more explosions.



MERCENARY III: THE DION CRISIS

Year: 1992
Publisher: Novagen
Developer: In-house

■ This time you find yourself within the most sordid and vile environment known: an election. While travelling around the solar system, it's your job to nudge things towards the most favourable outcome.



TOTAL ECLIPSE

Year: 1989
Publisher: MicroProse
Developer: Incentive

■ It's hard to choose a single *Freescape* game for inclusion here, but this one wins because it plays closest to the traditional arcade adventures with its sense of exploration and tricky inventory-based puzzles.



» [Amiga] Getting ready to wreak some havoc, *Midwinter*-style.

the surface of the planet and the player takes command of a militia to defend a frozen island enclave. The game is, in part, a military simulator that puts the player in touch with their inner guerrilla fighter. *Midwinter* allows the player to choose their own approach and tactics, and makes use of an innovative turn-based system that gives the player alternating control of many characters.

The follow-up, *Midwinter II: Flames Of Freedom*, was released the next year and improved almost every aspect of the game, including adding some simple missions that allowed for a gentler introduction to the gameplay mechanics. It also eschewed the turn-based character control for an RPG system of character design.

HUNTER

Hunter (1991) is another 3D arcade adventure game with a militaristic bent, and the coder, Paul Holmes, told us that *Mercenary* on the Commodore Plus/4 had been an inspiration. However, unlike *Mercenary* and most other games here, *Hunter* makes use of a third-person view. In the game, the player treks around a series of interconnected islands, making use of whatever vehicles and other resources they can find.

The first commercial game he worked on was another open-ended 3D game called *Siege On London*, which was, unfortunately, never released due to the collapse of publisher CRL. After an Amiga platform game called *Scorpion*, Paul began to plan the game that would become *Hunter*.

"I started developing the tools, engine and objects for *Hunter* prior to looking for a publishing deal," he explains. "I went to see Colin Fuidge at Activision with a demo. I only had the landscape and a few vehicles that you could board and control, but fortunately Colin saw the potential there, so I got a six-month contract."

As was common at the time, Paul worked largely on his own. Originally, a huge, open-ended campaign was the sole gameplay mode, but he added action and mission-based modes, partially to ensure accessibility to first-time players and also to assuage the fears of publishers of the time.

"It was just me programming, creating objects, populating maps and testing," he continues. "Activision commissioned Martin Walker to do the audio, and they provided some of the bitmap graphics for the panel and loading screen – I have no idea who did them. Apart from the occasional visit from Activision to see how I was getting on, I was pretty much left to my own devices."

Although still involved in software development, Paul left the games industry after a 1997 attempt to create a new *Hunter* game fell through.



> “Freescape pushed 8-bit computers to the very limit, but players didn’t care”

FREESCAPE

Historically speaking, the separation of engine and content is a relatively recent development. Part of the reason is that, at the time, resources were so tight that it made sense to tailor the game code for each and every game. Incentive Software’s *Freescape* was one of the first 3D game engines that was designed, from the outset, to be reusable. It started life on the Amstrad CPC, as that was one of the more capable 8-bit machines for filled-in 3D graphics, and it was later ported to the other popular 8-bit computers.

The first release to make use of the new engine was *Driller* (*Space Station Oblivion* outside Europe), released in 1987. It was an action game that appealed to adventure gamers, as puzzle-solving within the 3D environment played a bigger role than the combat did. Due to a frame rate that never got into double figures, it was clear that *Freescape* was pushing 8-bit computers such as the Spectrum to the very limit. However, the players themselves didn’t seem to care, and *Driller* was a commercial and critical success.

After the success of *Driller*, the engine was ported to the 16-bit Amiga, ST and PC, and subsequent games were planned. *Total Eclipse* (1988) cast the player as an explorer of an Egyptian pyramid. This was more traditional adventure game fare than *Driller*, relying on inventory-based puzzles, and *Castle Master* took a similar tack. Most of these games were released on all of the major platforms of the day, but as you might expect, the 16-bit releases benefited from greatly enhanced smoothness and detail in the graphics department.

In the eyes of many, the crowning achievement of the *Freescape* engine was not as a game at all, but rather a tool for making games. *3D Construction Kit*, released by Domark, is a complete 3D game design suite. From within the editor, it is possible to create standalone games that make use of 3D environments. Amazingly, the editor itself is extremely easy to use as it is interactive, in that the user can instantly see the result of changes as they are made. As with the other *Freescape*-powered software, it was a cross-platform release.



» Paul Holmes

» The map that Joey and Glyn used to plan out the *Cholo* city.



Level of Detail

MANY OF THE games featured here make use of level of detail scaling (LoD), a technique that automatically omits distant objects or reduces their complexity. So, for example, a road might be represented by a single line when it is in the distance, and only becomes a solid shape when the player gets close enough. Going closer still, the road is then given more detail such as the broken white lines in the centre. In the same way, an enemy aircraft or vehicle is a dot, a triangle and then a full-featured model once you are close enough. This is how these games were able to display huge vistas and entire cities from space. Note that this technique was largely forgotten for some time, and for most of the decade that followed, few PC games could manage outdoor environments.

THE DECLINE

In 1992, Apogee Software released *Wolfenstein 3D*, a pure shooter with amazing graphics and slick gameplay. The visuals were rendered using a technique called ray casting, which built up indoor scenes by scaling wall textures out of horizontal strips. *Wolfenstein 3D* drew gasps from PC owners because it not only looked fantastic but it also ran very quickly, allowing for the smooth movement that had previously been the exclusive domain of 2D games. The game was a hit with both the press and the punters. The new generation had arrived.

The game itself was a fun shooter, but before long people started to notice a few shortcomings. For a start, the gameplay was a step backwards in terms of depth, and the environments were not very interactive. Like the first generation of action games, there was a total absence of plot, and of interactive objects and characters. Another disappointment was that the 3D engine wasn’t truly 3D at all and could only render rooms and corridors on a single plane. Although the graphics had reached a new plateau, the gameplay had come full circle and was similar to the first 3D games, such as the tank game *Battlezone*.

However, games like *Doom* highlighted the areas in which the older generation of 3D games had been weak: a typical vintage 3D arcade adventure tends to be a bit difficult to play, with an awkward control system. If we had to choose a single phrase to sum up all of the games that we’ve looked at here, it might be ‘over-ambitious’. Machines that could only animate a couple of dozen coloured lines at once were being pushed into simulating an entire world. As a result, the gameplay can be like sitting in front of a highly acclaimed, high-brow Cannes prize winner and thinking, ‘This is great, but I wish they’d shoved in a car chase or two.’ In as much as *Doom* dumbed things down, it also refined the experience of 3D.

The games we’ve looked at here are a missing link in the history of virtual worlds in computer games. As computers became more powerful, the workload of creating content became enormous, and at the time of writing, development teams of 80 people and above are not uncommon. The sheer expense incurred by the size of the teams has led to the publishing houses becoming extremely risk-averse.

Whenever free-form gaming appears in a modern game, the buying public seem to react favourably, as evidenced by the brisk sales of games like *Red Dead Redemption*, *Fallout 3* and the *Grand Theft Auto* series. It says a lot that some of the games we’ve covered here are still peerless in terms of their scale and the sense of freedom that they offer. *



THE CLASSIC GAME



Many games are about domination in some way, from blowing away every last invading alien through to smashing an opponent's face in during a *Speedball* match. *Civilization* took this to its logical conclusion, tasking you with taking over the world, presumably while going 'mwahahaha' quite a lot and twirling your pointy moustache.

When *Civilization II* loomed into view, people were worried. Some thought it'd merely tart up the original with new graphics; others were concerned crucial addictive qualities would be buried under a layer of complexity. In the end, *Civilization II* became one of those rare sequels that bettered its predecessor and also those games in the series that came after it.

CIVILIZATION II



SETTLERS

You start the game with a single settler unit and can create more as the game progresses. Settlers are hugely important in *Civilization II* – not only can they found new cities, but they also build roads and other improvements.

WATER POWER

Even randomised maps in *Civilization II* tend to comprise islands or 'continents' surrounded by seas. Get in the maritime race early and you have the chance to stake a claim to the entire globe.





TRADING

There's money to be made in *Civilization II*, not only by taxing your own people, but also in setting up trade routes between various cities – although be aware that goods caravans are vulnerable to attack.

COMBAT

In every game you'll need combat units; even if you're a peaceful sort, AI opponents aren't. Archers are effective in the early days, but the first civilisation to get gunpowder and then tanks usually steals an advantage.





ESPIONAGE

If you feel your opponents are getting the better of you in the race for superior technology, send in a spy to steal some secrets. Although beware: if your spy is caught, you might be drawn into a war.

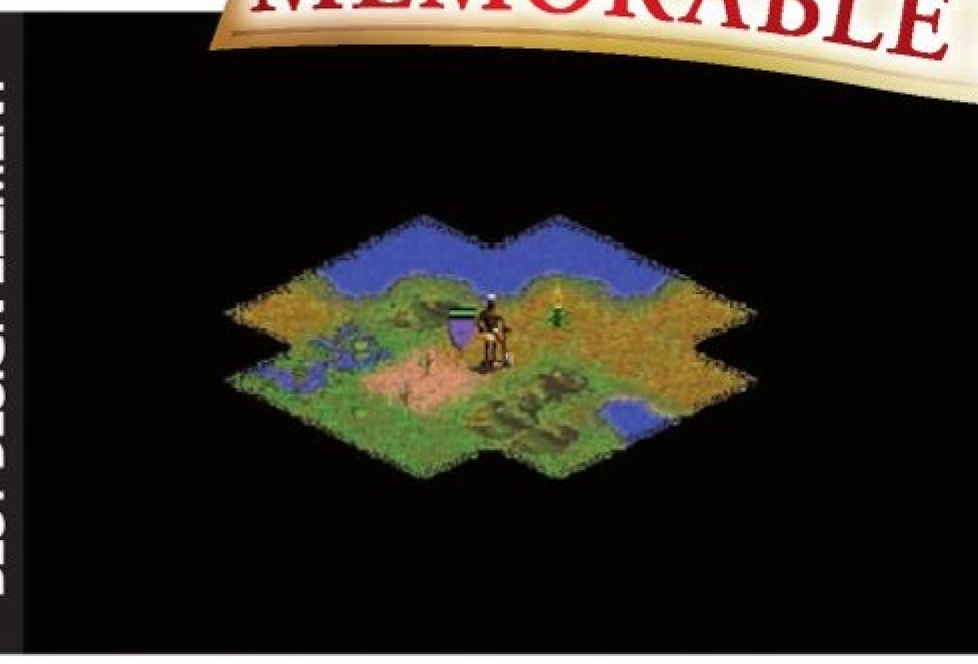
WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



Seconds to 'get', years to master

Civilization was the war game that got things right – a rare case where accessibility met depth, and where a complex system didn't force players to wade through an inch-thick manual; instead you could jump right in, but you'd be rewarded for being dedicated. And then *Civilization II* arrived, vastly improving the graphics, usability and AI, but leaving intact the core that made the original game so fascinating. Utterly replayable and totally captivating, this is a game where 'just another go' leads to hours-long sessions until people drag you away for trifling matters like eating and sleeping.

BEST DESIGN ELEMENT



I'm so lonely…

The basic starting point is a slice of genius. Your settler unit is dumped at a random point on the world's surface, surrounded by a sea of inky blackness. This offers a sense of wonder, because you simply don't know what's out there; and there's also excitement, because if you make your guy explore for a bit rather than found a city, there's a good chance he'll be killed by barbarians or some other nascent civilisation. Over time, more of the world is revealed in a manner that makes you feel like a pioneering explorer yourself… only without the scurvy.

BEST POWER-UPS



Things that make you go 'boom'

Like the original *Civilization*, the sequel enables you to build units related to the technologies you've discovered, which themselves rely on existing knowledge. Getting to the game's later, high-science technologies is vital, whether you're a peaceful sort (intending to win the game by sending a spaceship to Alpha Centauri before 2020) or rather more warlike (envisaging a campaign of destruction with increasingly powerful weaponry). Prior to nuclear weapons arriving on the scene, get yourself some tanks for attack and defence; once civilisations acquire missiles, protect your cities with SDI systems.

BEST LAUGHS



Face-time with crazies and zombies

In 1996, PCs were powerful enough to include in-game video and large animations. Sadly, production values weren't quite at Hollywood levels. Talk to another civilisation's emissary and you get to see a 3D model that looks like a freaky 'zombie' strutting their stuff, and on seeking the advice of your high council, you're confronted by video clips featuring five odd actors (including: gung-ho US military advisor; chic Eastern European female spy; 'Elvis' attitude advisor). Still, these things are good for a laugh and show the developers had a sense of humour when it comes to world domination.

BEST "WHAT?" MOMENT



The Great Wall of Chiswick

Civilization II plays with history, and only an idiot would expect it to be accurate. It is, after all, a game (albeit a chilling one when playing real-world scenarios – watch how quickly the French ally with Axis powers in World War II, before both kick seven shades out of the Allies). Along with making the game flexible, this can be a source of mirth, especially when building Wonders of the World (shorthand for super power-ups); they're modelled on real-world examples, but can be built anywhere, so you get the Pyramids of Paris, the Eiffel Tower in Delhi, or a Cardiff-based Hoover Dam.

BEST FEATURE



Conquer the universe

With the vast majority of games, both those in the modern era and those considered resolutely retro, you take what you're given; if you're very lucky, a great game might get an expansion pack at some point. By contrast, *Civilization II* was hugely hackable. Even newcomers could create basic variations on existing scenarios, but the truly dedicated could create new graphics and rules, for example turning *Civilization II* into a three-way battle between humans, Aliens and Predators. If that all sounds like a bit much effort, dozens of scenarios are available online, ready for download.

What the press said… ages ago

PC Gamer, 97%
An immensely addictive and playable strategy game that's the rightful heir to the *Civilization* crown.

PC Zone, 9.0/10
To succeed you will have to master combat, trading, diplomacy and research. And even after you manage to 'win' there are still challenges aplenty by doing the whole thing over again. Turn-based strategy has rarely been so well-handled.

GameSpot, 9.2/10
[…] There's really nothing available that can compete with its depth of play, subtlety of challenge, and pure addictive potential. The fact is, if you're a strategy fan, you've already bought this game, and if you're not, this title could turn you around.

What we think

The *Civilization* series continues to grow, but for us *Civilization II* remains the high point. It was effective, intuitive, fun and easy to tinker with. Subsequent entries in the series may look prettier, but lack the combination of immediacy and depth that ensures *Civilization II* classic status.



IN THE KNOW

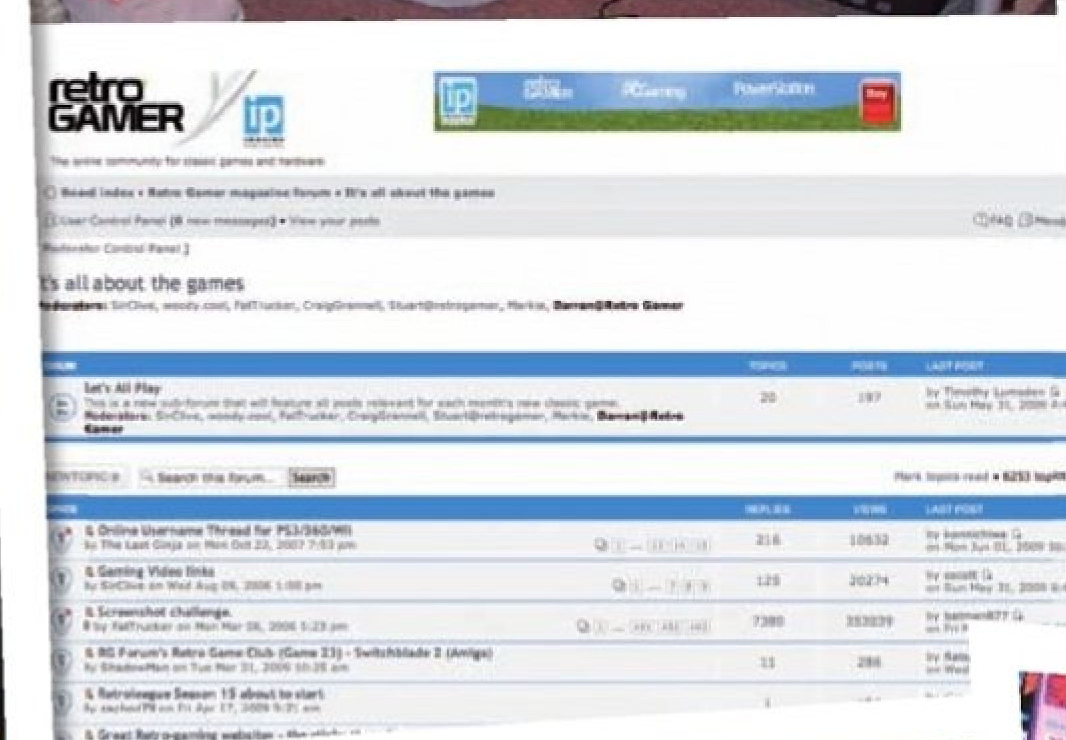
- **PLATFORM:** WINDOWS/MAC OS
- **PUBLISHER:** MICROPROSE
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1996
- **GENRE:** TURN-BASED STRATEGY
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

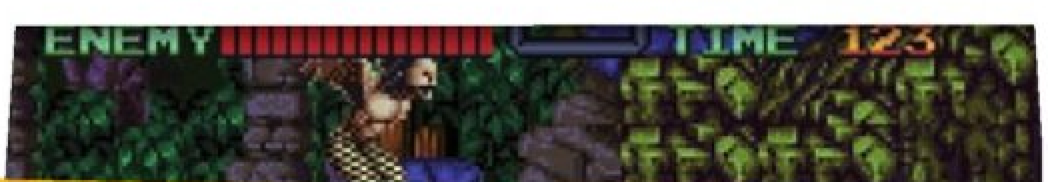
After starting off life on Nintendo's NES, Konami's fourth game in the Castlevania series finally made its way to Nintendo's new 16-bit console. Retro Gamer readers get together to explain why Castlevania's 16-bit debut remains one of the best 2D games in the series













LET'S ALL PLAY:

SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV



INFO

Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house
First Released: 1991
Featured System: SNES

First impressions

Darran *Super Castlevania IV* is a strange beast for me, because I actually think it starts off really poorly. There's no doubting that it's very atmospheric due to the stunning music, but the first couple of stages are just so dull to play. Simon's movement seems sluggish – I hate the way he slides as he walks – and the graphics are too garish and a world away from the earlier NES games. This initial malaise soon fades, though, and by the time you reach that horse-riding skeleton it just keeps getting better and better. Stick with this beauty, for like a fine wine it definitely improves with age.

Mayhem I'd played the original *Castlevania* quite a bit, as it was one of the few games I had for the NES before it got sold. So my only hope when buying *Castlevania IV* was that either it would be a little easier, or my gaming skills had improved with age. Probably a combination of both. From the first level and that music, I was hooked…

Jeremiah Jones Elation probably sums it up best. Elation at how much atmosphere was simply dripping from the game. Elation at how my new Super Nintendo could display this kind of audio and visual quality, and elation at the thought that this was only the beginning of both a very good game and the lifespan of a very good console.

Shinobi I had only previously played *Haunted Castle* in a Porthcawl arcade and kept getting killed by the Medusa boss, which I found scary. I played it on my friend's SNES and thought it was really slow and easy – I reached the chandeliers on my first attempt – and I was disappointed it didn't play like the arcade version. After owning the PS2 *Haunted Castle*, I realise how horrible that game is and that the SNES *Castlevania* is infinitely better.

stejay215 I didn't play it on the SNES, but did play it on the Wii Virtual Console along with all the other *Castlevania* games. After playing *Castlevania I* and *III*, I was in high spirits, and it paid off, because I love it. I loved the music, the graphics, the gameplay, and its replay value. Even after playing the game once, I knew I would play it again. It was on the SNES, after all!

deadpan666 I loved the intro. Really set the tone for the game! And the music was groovy! On starting up, I thought the graphics looked a bit messy in places, but after getting a bit further into the game they did get better. As for gameplay, I found it quite tough to begin with, especially the rotating platforms, but that just made me persevere with it even more…

Alarm I absolutely loved it from the moment I stuck the cart in. The music, the Mode 7 effects and the gameplay, though somewhat clunky, were superb for the time. It was a great showcase for what the SNES was capable of.

JetSetWilly I've literally only just played it and it's good. I have been spoiled by *Symphony Of The Night*, but I've a feeling that this







GO DEEPER: TRIVIA TRAIL

» *Super Castlevania* is based on the original NES game. It features five additional levels, though, leading up to the castle assault.

» Changes were made to avoid Western censors. They included dressing nude statues and removing crosses.

» *Super Castlevania IV* was the first game in the series to allow you to use the Vampire Killer whip to swing across gaps.

» The soundtrack contains remixes from the series. Notables include *Bloody Tears* from *Simon's Quest* and *Vampire Killer* from *Castlevania*.

will grow on me. The intro is great as well, and it does ooze atmosphere.

Best level



Miketendo That's a tough call. I probably had more fun in Level 3 (The Cave) than any other level. By the way, has anyone else noticed the Fig Newton-looking floor tiles when approaching Dracula in the final level? It always makes me want Fig Newtons.

shinobi The ballroom level where you fight the ghostly dancers and the woman in the picture came to life and stopped you from walking past. For some reason I had a soft spot for the stable level with Mr Ed's ghostly relative, Mr Head: a disembodied horse's head…

stejay215 Stage 10 (The Clock Tower) I just love the music, the challenge and the feeling when you finally beat it. It's also a nice reminder of *Castlevania III*.

thesubcon3 I really enjoyed the first few levels since I had to play them so much to progress through the later ones. The design is flawless and takes it really easy on you, unlike the later levels where the game mauls you.

Jeremiah Jones Back in '91 or '92 I probably would've said Stage 4 because of the way it tinkered with the hardware's Mode 7 abilities and made you think that gravity itself was going awry, but these days it's the last stage that gives me the most enjoyment for its ability to keep me on the edge of my seat.

Best boss



Stuart I have a couple of favourites and neither of them happens to be Dracula. My first is the Medusa you face early on in the game. She's incredibly annoying due to the sheer number of baby snakes she constantly throws at you and her turn-to-stone glare. My other favourite is the bat that can be found in the treasury. Even now I love the way you can knock little bits of jewellery off it with each hit.

Miketendo I think the fact that the three-headed hydra monster thing creates slowdown during the game makes the battle that much more epic. That's one thing that always stuck out in my mind. It was special effects due to lack of processing power!

thesubcon3 The first time I fought Frankenstein's monster I couldn't believe that he was actually in a *Castlevania*.

CIH The dude with the scythe that looks like Death, just before Dracula. Also the guardian boss sequences just before the final boss kick ass.

Alarm The Zapf Bat is visually the most attractive boss, but the Grim Reaper is the best in this game. Dracula was a letdown and far too easy.

Jeremiah Jones I really enjoy fighting Koranot, the golem boss at the end of Stage 4. He shrinks as you damage him, making him a harder target to hit as the fight progresses. The falling rocks also add a frantic dose to the fight. I also get a laugh at how Koranot spelled backwards is 'ton a rok'.

lanky316 As I work my way through it they tend to get better and better. My love for Medusa in Greek mythology, though, puts that one as probably my favourite.

Best music



Darran While I was never a fan of *Super Castlevania*'s visuals, its audio was another matter. Masanori Adachi and Taro Kudo – the latter created *Axelay*'s awesome soundtrack – created an incredibly majestic piece of work that still stands up today. If I had to pick just one piece of music, though, it would be the wondrous melody that plays during the final credits. Achingly beautiful in places, it's enhanced by a slideshow of some of the game's best moments. An amazing piece of work that still sounds fantastic.

dste I was going to say the music from Level 3-2 as it feels the most doom and gloom in the game, but I really love the music that kicks in about halfway through the fight with Dracula, which I believe may also be the first level music. It just feels very climatic and 'yeah, come on'.

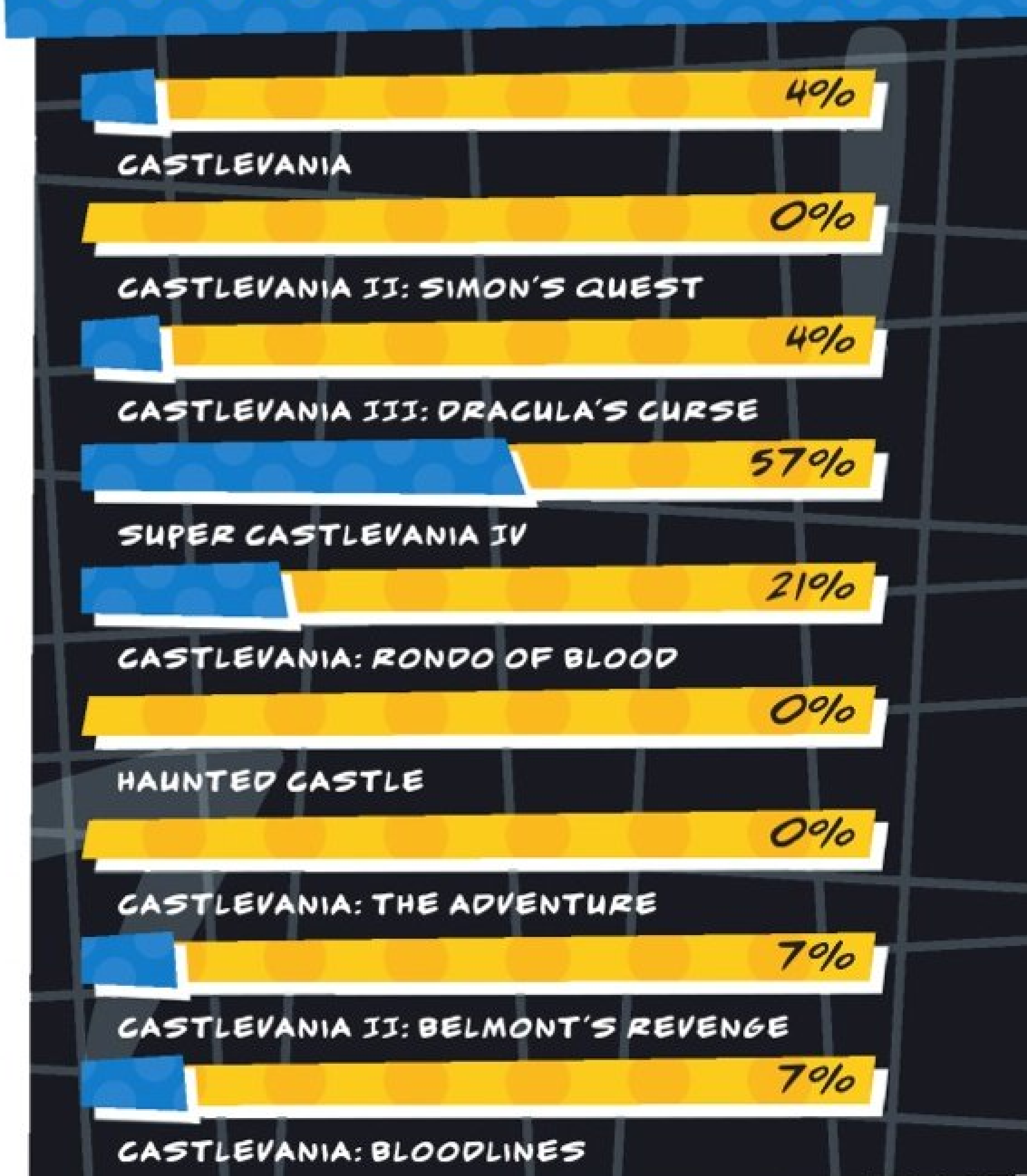
Miketendo The image of the castle crumbling with Simon's hair blowing in the wind, and the organs playing in the background. It's just so final-sounding! I'd say it's a toss-up between the end theme and The Cave. The Cave's music is truly a work of art. It's beautiful, dangerous and fits the level perfectly.

Really, though, the game's entire soundtrack is a masterpiece.

Mayhem The opening music is great, but I love the piece called *Bloody Tears*, in the Clock Tower, jumping up all the massive cogs…

FORUM POLL

Best 2D non-Metroidvania Castlevania game



LET'S ALL PLAY: SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

CIH Second stage, beginning with the small forested section then through the aqueduct after seeing off Medusa. I also like the sequence in Stage 3 after the caverns as you make your way up the waterfall.

gman72 The soundtrack to this game is utterly sublime. Spooky orchestral movements mixed with up jazz fusions, piano pieces and some great versions of past *Castlevania* tunes. How Masanori Adachi squeezed this brilliant soundtrack out of the SNES sound chip is beyond me.

stejay215 The ending tune is amazing and gives you a feeling of real accomplishment.



The opening theme is really creepy and sets the tone for things to come. The theme before you meet Dracula in the final battle is awesome as well. The Dungeon has an amazing theme, but for me my favourite is always going to be *Bloody Tears*. One of my favourite pieces of music, it's just such a brilliant partner to the level and the way it builds up to the drums. Just divine.

deadpan666 The music in the intro. I recently watched a long official trailer for the new game that used this tune, and it worked well even with today's HD graphics!

Smurph The soundtrack is the only part of the game that I feel still holds up – it's absolutely amazing. The first level gets me every time – slow beginning then a great tune to back it up. Brilliant.

o.pwuaioc They're all great, but for me personally it has to be *Simon's Theme*. Love hearing the metal covers of it on YouTube.

Best weapon

Stuart For me it will always be the Vampire Killer. A signature weapon of practically every *Castlevania* game, it's as synonymous with the series as Dracula himself and always sounds so satisfying to use. A great all-round weapon that is just as good for scaling precipices as it is killing the undead.

Miketendo If we're talking secondary weapons, I'm going to go with the boomerang cross. It got the most bang for your buck. The holy water didn't start getting really good in these games until *Circle Of The Moon*, when you could whip it at people.

deadpan666 The dagger. I like the speediness of it, and it's straightforward. You throw it, it kills stuff! No nonsense.

Smurph The cross is the correct answer for pretty much every Castlevania ever.

o.pwuaioc Depends on the situation. For secondary weapons – otherwise the whip would be number one – the stopwatch works wonders. On levels where you're going up or down, the axe is great since it can reach things your whip can't. For bosses, cross or dagger – although cross is better since it can hit them from the other side of the chamber.

Nothing quite replaces the whip, though.



» [SNES] *Super Castlevania IV* frequently ranks among the absolute best games on the SNES.



CLASSIC GAME? YOU MUST BE JOKING

Just because a game's praised, it doesn't mean that everyone is going to like it…

"IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T LIKE IT, AS, BEING HORRIBLE AT IT, I CAN'T GET PAST THE SECOND LEVEL" — SNOWKATT

"IT FEELS SO CLUNKY NOW, AND WHILE IT PROVIDES A MODICUM OF AWESOMENESS MAINLY OF THE ROSE-TINTED VARIETY, I JUST DON'T FEEL IT PLAYS THAT WELL" — SMURPH

"IT'S A BIT TOO HARDCORE FOR ME. THAT'S WHY I CAN'T GET ALONG WITH IT" — IPMARKS

FURTHER PLAY

Similar titles you may want to try

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW



FEATURED SYSTEM: PS3
YEAR RELEASED: 2010

It still amazes us just how close to the SNES game this actually is. MercurySteam didn't attempt to hide the fact that *Lords Of Shadow* was based heavily on Konami's fourth *Castlevania* game, and it's easy to see the similarities. It's a fantastic game in its own right as well and needs to be experienced straight away.

RUSTY



FEATURED SYSTEM: PC-98
YEAR RELEASED: 1993

If you missed our retrospective all the way back in issue 29, you'll know that *Rusty* is a surprisingly slick and competent clone of *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood*. In fact, the two games are so similar that some *Castlevania* sites actually suspect that Konami itself may have had some involvement with the game. It's definitely worth playing; just be aware that sourcing a copy isn't easy.

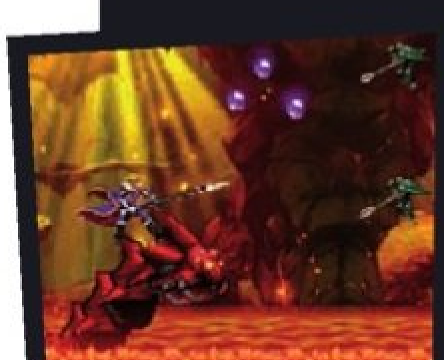
CASTLEVANIA: THE BLOOD WAY



FEATURED SYSTEM: FLASH
YEAR RELEASED: 2008

Considering that this is running in Flash, this unofficial *Castlevania* game is surprisingly impressive. Taking inspiration from both *Symphony Of The Night* and *Harmony Of Dissonance* – and more than a few sprites too – it's a solid little adventure that's perfect if you have a spare ten minutes to kill. It's rather difficult in places but certainly captures the spirit of proper *Castlevania* titles.

SOUL OF DARKNESS



FEATURED SYSTEM: DSIWARE
YEAR RELEASED: 2010

While Gameloft's DSiWare is unashamedly a *Castlevania* clone, it's actually a bloody good one and an essential download if you have access to a DSi. Taking elements from many different *Castlevania* games, you can upgrade weapons and morph into a variety of useful animals. Even the map and certain bosses are identical. It still feels like its own game, though, and there's certainly no arguing with its sub-£5 price point.

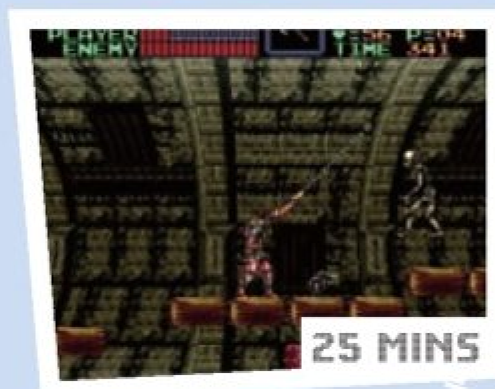
MOMENTS IN TIME

The best sections of Super Castlevania IV and when you can expect to see them

1 BUILDING ATMOSPHERE

If there's one thing that *Super Castlevania* does really well it is creating an atmosphere so sharp you could cut yourself on it. Before the game has even started, you're treated to a moody sequence that explains the game's back story and gives you a fantastic impression of just how good the SNES's sound chip actually is. It sets the scene for your journey perfectly.


1 MIN


25 MINS

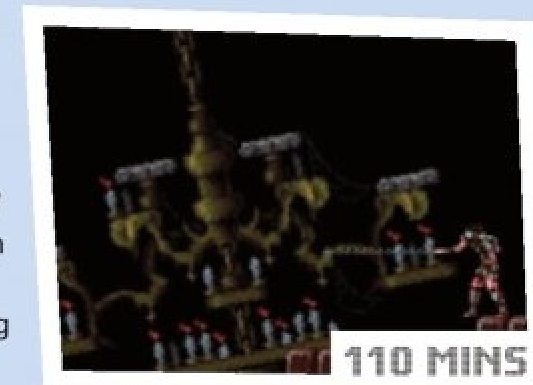
2 TUNNEL VISION

Before you reach Dracula's castle you're treated to one of the best set pieces in the game. First you're stuck in the Mode 7 room that actually rotates around you, and the next you're fighting through a huge skeleton-strewn tunnel that constantly spins as you fight through it. Even with the large amounts of slowdown, it still looks amazing.

3 GOLEMS ARE US

There are a host of great bosses to battle in *Super Castlevania IV*, but one of our favourites is easily the huge Mode 7 golem. Initially towering over Simon thanks to its sheer size, it puts the SNES hardware to good use, getting smaller and faster the more you hit it. Oh, and did we mention the occasional falling debris that makes the battle even more dangerous?


45 MINS


110 MINS

4 CHANDELIER SWINGING

Mode 7 effects are used exceptionally well in *Super Castlevania IV*. One section late in Dracula's castle sees Simon having to make his way across a series of huge chandeliers that are crazily swinging from side to side. A piano plays in the background, while subtle lighting effects further add to the dramatics.

5 GHOST DOG

This whole thing is rather strange. Just after you traverse the chandeliers, there is a hidden bonus room that is filled with goodies but also houses an annoying ghostly dog and its elderly owner. Once you kill the phantom hound it gives out a plaintive howl and is quickly joined by its loyal master. After shedding a few tears, he fades away with his beloved dog. Very odd, but also strangely touching.


112 MINS

Why it's a classic

Darran Konami was easily one of the best 16-bit developers for Nintendo's SNES, and *Super Castlevania IV* is proof of that. While it starts off a little slowly, it soon majestically cartwheels from one stunning set piece to the next and is always filling the player with imagination and wonder. Expertly paced and with a row of fantastic boss encounters, it's another slice of brilliance from Konami and a platform adventure that even non-*Castlevania* fans will enjoy.

Miketendo Though the game is essentially a retold tale of the first game, *Super Castlevania IV* is one of the few videogames that, to me, always felt like a work of art. I'm a huge fan of the *Castlevania* series. I received this game for my 11th birthday and I fell in love with it. The whip has never been better in any *Castlevania* game. The music has never been more elegant and exciting, and the challenge was fair and not cheap like the previous games. This game made me a *Castlevania* fan for life.

gman72 16-bit platform games don't come much better than this. The graphics and music combine in a beautiful and artistic fashion. To play it is to love it.

stejay215 Because it's on the SNES, it's got great graphics, replay value, difficulty, controls, gameplay and music. It's everything a game should have and more. Nothing is wrong with this game, and it's one of the greatest games ever made, let alone one of the greatest SNES and *Castlevania* games.



thesubcon3 The fact that it's essentially the first *Castlevania* retold shows that Konami really knew how to reinvent the series for the 16-bit generation. The simple additions of multiple whipping directions and the ability to jump onto stairs always made this game a favourite of the linear *Castlevania* games.

Skull Commander I have been thinking about the question of why I love *Castlevania* so much, and I have come to the conclusion that it isn't just one or two elements but the whole package.

The atmosphere is amazing, with one of the greatest soundtracks ever. The graphics perfectly suit the game, and there are plenty of amazing, gothic-looking levels. There is a sense of isolation in the game as you make your way on the epic journey, and it has a real old horror feel about it.

The playability is top notch and I never get bored of going through the game, no matter how many times I play it. I feel that none of the games that followed it ever had the same feel, and although I enjoy the 'Metroidvania'-style games, I prefer the more traditional games overall.

dste It's a classic simply because it's a great game to play. Nearly 20 years later and you still cannot fail to be impressed by the gameplay, enemies, bosses, music, weapons, levels, graphics, Mode 7…

For me there isn't one simple thing that you can put your finger on and say, 'Yes, that's why it's a classic.' It's just everything that blends perfectly together to make it a classic game.





NEXT MONTH'S GAME

DIDDY KONG RACING

Want to join in the fun? Then head on over to **www.retrogamer.net/forum** now.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

IN DEPTH



» *Battletoads* is the only game in the series to allow all three heroes to fight on screen at once – making it three times as awesome.

» The game is incredibly gory at points. Previous instalments were certainly violent but never quite to this level.

» Each of the characters have their own attributes and oversized attacks. It's a staple of the series.



BATTLETOADS

■ **Developer:** Rare ■ **Year:** 1994 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **Created by Tim and Chris Stamper to go up against Mirage Studios' insanely popular *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Battletoads* became a popular 8-bit franchise famed for its great visuals, its world sharing obvious parallels with that of the Turtles, and its variety and humour.**

This relatively obscure arcade game, also known as *Super Battletoads*, is the fifth and currently last game in the franchise. Set across six stages, divided by a *Street Fighter II*-style bonus round that sees our three heroes kicking the stuffing out of a rat-driven space ship, the game is packed with action and humour at every turn.

Selecting between the three central heroes – Rash, Pimple and Zitz – each of whom has their own signature oversized attacks and unique power, the game is bombastic, colourful, well-designed and unmistakably Rare.

Easily as good as anything coming from the stables of Konami and Sega at the time, *Battletoads* had personality, great combat, and plenty of funny moments.

Be it the second stage, which is set in some kind of deranged Christmas grotto, or the way you can attack some of the larger enemies with a few sharp green knuckles to their pink teabags, or even just the insane level of cartoon violence on display, each level is individually themed and does a great job in spurring you to keep playing.

Battletoads plays like a real last hurrah for the series, packed with nods to past games. Not only do memorable boss characters like General Slaughter make an appearance, but many of the stages feel inspired by classic levels from previous *Battletoads* games. The first, which takes place on the top of one of the Dark Queen's battleships, echoes a similar opening stage of *Battletoads & Double Dragon*, while another, which sees the toads travelling down a pit wearing jetpacks, will take fans right back to the memorable 'Wookie Hole' stage in the original game.

While feeling entrenched in the past, setting this arcade sequel apart is the fact that it's incredibly gory. Limbs take to the sky like startled pigeons, heads roll like in Henry VIII's fever dreams, and cartoon blood cakes the screen like an episode of *Itchy & Scratchy*.

As was revealed in our Rare interview in issue 84, a SNES port was started but was later canned, possibly due to the middling reaction to the arcade game. In our opinion it's the best game in the series and a tragedy that no home conversion saw release.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

CAPTAIN COMMANDO 1991

For cartoon gore that has a wryly humorous undertone, look no further than Capcom's madcap superhero brawler *Captain Commando*. The game received a port to the Super Nintendo, and later appeared on a couple of Capcom compilation packs for the PS2, Xbox and PSP.

DEAD CONNECTION

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Shooter



» [Arcade] Though clichéd, the attention to detail in each of the game's action scenarios is impressive.

■ Clearly influenced by the movie *The Untouchables*, this gangster-themed shooter from Taito sees a posse of cops tooling up to take down an army of mobsters in Fifties America. Choosing between four heroes, none of which seem to have any discernible unique attributes other than their ridiculous JLS-coloured trench coats, the game sees you blast your way through eight waves of armed mobsters in different, single-screen locations.

Dead Connection, then, is essentially an 'arena shooter', but one with a number of elements that elevate it from typical games of the genre – which often plonk the player on a unexciting bit of flat ground and task them with ending the life of everything on screen before they can proceed to the next one.

While the stages don't scroll, Taito has offset the fact by lavishly dressing them. As well as ladders to climb and building cubbyholes to hide in, they're also primed with destructible screen furniture and gung-ho stuff going off in the background to attract your gaze. From speeding mobster cars careering into frame to falling crystal chandeliers, the environment has a big part to play in the game's overall charm. It's certainly a unique and smartly dressed shooter.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

NAM-1975 1990



Though not an arena shooter, we plonked SNK's realistic war sim here anyway owing to the fact that, like *Dead Connection*, it's a unique-feeling take on the shooter genre. It's also brimming with action and has a similarly tenuous connection with cinema.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

FINAL FIGHT 1989



It's clear that the creators of *Karate Blazers* have played Capcom's defining fighter. Both games feature similar enemies, but *Karate Blazers* features its own low-rent versions of Guy and Cody. *Final Fight* was also ported to everything except washing machines.

KARATE BLAZERS

■ **Developer:** Video System ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up



» [Arcade] The action in *Karate Blazers* can get a little hectic. We've actually lost our character among the crowd.

■ *Karate Blazers* certainly doesn't win any awards for originality. This derivative game follows the exploits of four martial artists embarking on a well-worn mission to retrieve some ancient scrolls and a kidnapped girl.

About two missions in, you realise that you've pretty much seen everything the game has to offer. Each character has a meagre number of attacks, including a pretty lame special move each, even by generic beat-'em-up standards: one character punches the floor to create a circle of flames around him, which perhaps may have looked cool once in the Nineties, and another sees a character glow and then cartwheel around the screen, which hasn't and never will look cool in any time. The enemies all look familiar too. There are angry wrestler types, big rotund guys who look like they're smuggling baby planets under their tops, agile ninjas and even the odd robot to battle.

Karate Blazers does, however, have three redeeming features: it's fast, full and fluid. When it gets going, loads of enemies fill the screen, and the action doesn't seem to slow, even for a second.

It might hold your attention for half an hour, but ultimately *Karate Blazers* is a game with bags of characters but zero character.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

DOWNTOWN

■ **Developer:** Seta ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ Developed by Seta and licensed by Taito, *Downtown* is a typical scrolling beat-'em-up, but with one difference: it's viewed from the perspective of a cloud.

Playing a guy who looks like he's just staggered from an office party, you have to take down a corrupt police force and the criminal gang they're doing business with. Shuffling through the streets, you fight buxom girls dressed like Tina Turner, armed police officers and an assortment of gang-bangers.

Where *Downtown* fails hard is its fiddly controls and limited fight repertoire. A slow punch and sluggish kick is basically all you get, and the fact that your little man has the amazing ability to rotate his body 360 degrees without moving his legs does nothing to improve the situation.

We struggled to find any redeeming quality about *Downtown*. In fact, it's so tedious that we could only endure two levels before shutting it off, cheering the fact that it never got a home conversion.





"only a handful of people in the world had figured out how to do 3d"



STARGLIDER

Borne of a love of the Star Wars cab, Starglider wowed on its arrival with stunning presentation and immersive environments. Andy Smith talks to creator Jez San and project manager Gary Sheinwald about organic game development, the rewards of success, and getting the OBE

"My father was exporting people's personal effects when they emigrated," says Jez San of his importer/exporter father. "It came in handy, because in 1978, when I was 12 and a half, he imported one of the first computers available, a Radio Shack TRS-80 Model I Level II. After playing all the games I could find on it, I got frustrated and learned to program so I could try and make my own. Then the BBC computer came out in 1981 and I was hooked. Finally, I had colour and multi-channel sound – the essential elements of a computer game – and having the built-in assembler was the most amazing idea."



» [Atari ST] Take a hit and this is what happens. It's a very clear way of saying 'Best not do that again!'

You may well have heard of Jez San. Since the age of 16, when he set up Argonaut Software, he has been deeply involved in the industry, first developing games; then hardware, even working with Nintendo to develop the Super Famicom's Super FX chip; and more recently online gaming and mobile applications. Oh, and he was awarded an OBE, too.

After first writing two books about the Sinclair QL, Jez began working on 1984's side-scrolling shooter *Skyline Attack* for the Commodore 64, and then something caught his eye in the arcade. It was a cabinet that threw vectors around the screen like they would one day be superseded, and had *that* theme tune: the *Star Wars* cabinet.



» [C64] The C64 version was less well received than other conversions. Jez feels that this may have been down to the fact that the machine was underpowered.

"I loved it so much I tried to buy the home computer rights from Atari," says Jez. "They were playing ball, so I started development of my own version, and then all of a sudden they said they weren't interested. So I detoured my game and made it more original, inspired by, rather than based on, the *Star Wars* coin-op."

And that, folks, was the genesis of something very special indeed.

"I was talking with Amiga in 1984 and was negotiating to get one of their prototype models, codenamed the Lorraine. Then Commodore bought them and everything changed, so I bought a classic Mac and started work on my 3D technology, and *Starglider* was born. When the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga machines finally came out, I ported to them from the Mac."

The Mac version was later dropped as Jez didn't feel the system was really a home machine at the time. "It was many years," he remembers, "before a Mac version came back." What with all these trials and tribulations, the game would be in development for three years.

Project manager Gary Sheinwald remembers how his own involvement with the game began: "Although *Starglider* was under way when I joined [*Starglider* publisher] Rainbird in May 1986, I'd known Jez for about four years by then, and had seen *Starglider* evolve from a rotating cube



» [Atari ST] According to this computer screen, enemy fleet commander Herman Krudd is aboard this ship. Take it down quick!

STARGLIDER



on a rented Apple Mac to something a bit like the *Star Wars* arcade game, and then start to become the *Starglider* we all know."

And was he immediately blown away? "Pretty much anything in 3D was exciting then. Only a handful of people in the world had figured out how to do it, and to see hidden line removal and animating objects – remember that games such as *Battlezone* didn't have any significant animation; *Starglider* had bird-like craft with flapping wings – was very impressive at the time."

So no, it was no longer a *Star Wars* game. There were no Jedi involved and very little heavy breathing, but *Starglider* was a revelation in its own right – crisp vectors, a free-roaming 3D world, and smooth gameplay that mixed the best of the blaster and flight sim genres. Impossible as it may seem now, in this time of big development teams and even bigger budgets, *Starglider* 'evolved', as Jez explains: "The game had an initial design and several of the elements were there, as well as a whole lot of stuff that didn't work in reality. The game mostly evolved from the loose spec. I just wanted to make the best game I could in the time available."

And feedback was, of course, important. "Jez was very open to feedback, especially on gameplay difficultly ramping, damage values, scoring, etc," Gary remembers. "I designed all the level maps on graph paper and typed in all the values for everything such as hit points, scores, damage, refuelling/recharging rates and so on. Gameplay developed as we went along. If I wanted something changed and Jez agreed, he'd make a code change, or I would make a data change directly myself. These days it'd be rounds of focus group testing and QA department input. None of that existed then. I did 99 per cent of the QA – there was no testing department and no external testing. Everything was very organic, and also quite informal. Back then there were no rigid production processes like we have today."

"I'm one of those coders that likes to informally think about how things are to work and then tries it out," Jez continues. "Then tweaks and retries. The continual tuning led me to eventually make my own assembler program called ArgAsm to reduce the turnaround time between tweaking and testing a game. I also, jointly with Foo Katan, developed the first PDS, the Programmers Development System. It was used by David Braben and Ian Bell on porting *Elite* from the BBC to the C64, and it's what got me my first break with Rainbird. I agreed to help them port *Elite*, if they agreed to give me my own game deal – *Starglider*."

And so *Starglider*, along with text adventure *The Pawn*, became the launch title for Rainbird's line of

the Egrons strike back

"FOR THE SEQUEL, Argonaut had grown from a one-man operation to a team of about seven and there was more input from the whole team," Gary says. "The big change was going from a game set on one planet to having interplanetary gameplay and everything that it entailed technically and creatively."

Starglider 2 was not just more of the same. Gone were the 3D wireframe graphics and in came a solid 3D graphics engine that was jaw-dropping at the time. Critics raved about it, *The Games Machine* dubbing it "the most enjoyable game of the year", and sales were superb. And if the original *Starglider* was a love letter to *Star Wars*, the sequel was a steamy letter in a gentlemen's magazine to *Return Of The Jedi*. This time around the player was tasked with collecting the workings of a bomb with which to destroy an evil space station that was being constructed as you played, before it became fully operational and started blowing up planets. Sound familiar?

Even with the inevitably high expectations, the game still grew organically, as the original had done. "It was just a lot of 'Wouldn't it be great if we could do so-and-so?' and then the team would just go and try to do it," Gary says. "I don't recall any upper management interference or input that put any undue pressure on the team to meet expectations. The hype didn't affect me whatsoever and I don't think it affected the team either. Things were different back then! I don't remember worrying about meeting expectations."

The game came packaged with a novella as before, but this time there was a little bit of extra fun to be had too: Painting With Rolf. "That came about because of a bug in the game at one point," explains Gary. "Rick Clucas of Argonaut showed it to me at their offices one day and I said that it was cool and they should leave it in as a feature, so they adapted the Object Viewer to make it into a simple 'painting' thing. 'Rolf' refers to Rolf Harris."

Starglider 2 was not without its issues, though. As you neared them, objects would sometimes break apart into their component parts; some felt that the game's more open-ended gameplay was confusing and offered no clear direction; and in an ostensibly canny move to save costs on packaging and production, the game was released for the Amiga and Atari ST on one disk using the ADLS (Argonaut Dual Loading System). The system would mean that the game could load up on either system. However, it proved unreliable and *Starglider 2* was the last time the innovation was used.

A second sequel was rumoured to be in early development, with some designs put together and basic environments programmed, but the game sadly failed to materialise.



» [CPC] That there may look like a Starglider but is, in actual fact, a cunningly disguised Egron up to no good. Get blasting!

» [CPC] You can dock in these handy stations to have your shields repaired and your stock of missiles topped up. You can also interrogate the computer system to learn more about the enemy.



"effectively my parents financed the game because I was living at home for free"

games for the Atari ST and Amiga, and the technical prowess on display in the game assured its success. As did its innovation…

Long before *MechWarrior*, *Starglider* had a neat little idea to do with firing missiles: you fire it and then switch to that missile's POV, guiding it to its demise – and, hopefully, one of the enemies' as well. "I loved the idea of changing the 3D viewpoint," Jez remembers. "That sounded exciting to me, but then I wanted you to be able to control it and see where it went, to guide it. Nowadays, I guess we call them RPVs in the military and 'after touch' in games, but back then it was sort of novel."

Groundbreaking as it was, the production of *Starglider* was not without its trials, especially for a bedroom coder. Sort of…

"I did have an office at home, so I wasn't technically in the bedroom," explains Jez, "but it was certainly a home project, so effectively my parents financed it because I was living at home for free. *Starglider* took from 1984 to 1986." No dev kits back then, though. "There were many challenges, like inventing the 3D system, and on the Atari ST *Starglider* was the first game to use sampled sound. I was sat with my ST open, measuring voltages off the sound chip, and modulating the volume controls in real-time on the three channels to find what voltages came out so that I could play samples. I hired a Roland Juno synth to sample the song, and the title music by Dave Lowe let the *Starglider* theme sing out and was much appreciated at the time. He has since moved on to make TV themes like *Grand Designs*."

Producing the game was becoming a mammoth task, and was certainly a labour of love for more than just one man. "Although it was a bedroom-developed game, we shouldn't forget that even then plenty of other people contributed to the final product," Gary says. "Paul Hibbard did all the 3D models on graph paper; I was the poor bastard who had to type in all the co-ordinates for every point and every frame of animation by hand; Clare Edgeley was the voice of the ship computer; Rick Clucas coded some of the low-level system stuff like mouse input/output; and Jez's mum, Zoe, brought up tea and biscuits throughout the day and night during the final days of sleepless development. I don't think the game would have been released on time without her…"

"I farmed out the bits I didn't have the time or skill to do," Jez recalls. "So I could focus on the gameplay."

Coding back then was a hardcore thing, not for the faint-hearted. The good old days, when coders were inventive and computers were stubborn in their limitations, are something that Jez fondly remembers: "You took control of the machine and hit the pedal to the metal. You programmed in assembly or machine language, and you accessed the hardware directly to make it 'sing' in ways it was never designed to. Nowadays, you don't talk to the hardware directly; you use libraries and APIs. All the hard stuff is done for you and all you do is tell it what you want it to do, rather than help it do it, like we used to do. And gone is assembly language. Nowadays people program in C or even higher-level languages where they have little control over what is happening on the actual microprocessor at a register level.

Argonaut takes on BT

"MY ANCIENT HISTORY is that at 16 years old, in 1982, I had a summer job at Silversoft working alongside my school friend Foo [Fouad Katan]," Jez recalls. It may have been a great way to cut his teeth, but the young Jez was soon yearning for new challenges and was hard at work setting up Argonaut. And to get his first business deal secured, Jez had to get a little inventive.

BT had launched its Telecom Gold service, an early email-type system, and Jez had his sights on it. He set about hacking into the system in order to discover flaws in its security, and then produced a report, which he offered for sale to BT. Keen to plug up the holes in its defences, BT took the bait and Argonaut paid its first cheque into the bank.

Back then, I used to program very efficiently. I knew at any point what was in all of the registers so I didn't need to push and pop things onto the stack. This made the code run much, much faster than if someone had written it the normal way, and also no compiler at the time could create code like that. Probably even to this day, a compiler couldn't beat that style of programming."

But for those on the joystick end of things, *Starglider* remains a vivid memory because of just how immersive it was. It was the sandbox game of its day. And just like it sometimes seems that we can never quite recapture the spirit of those days, so too have other aspects of games changed – we all remember that buzz from a new, innovative release, but we should not forget the joys to be beholden even before that. We are talking, of course, about the packaging. Environmentally friendly

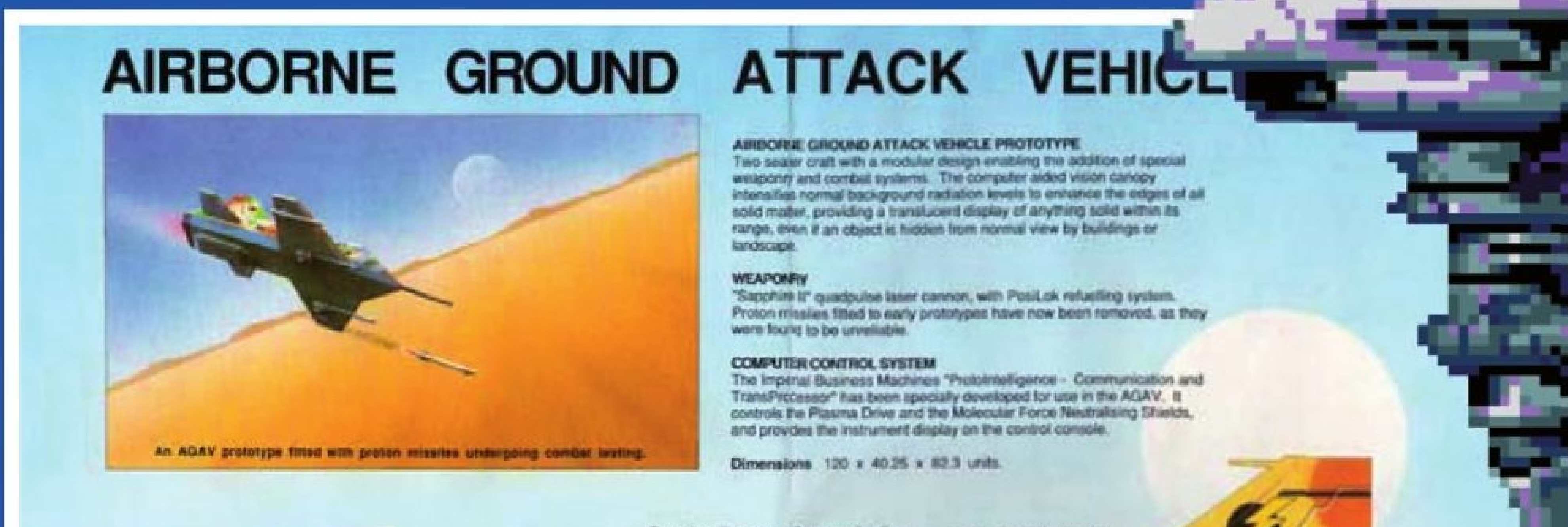


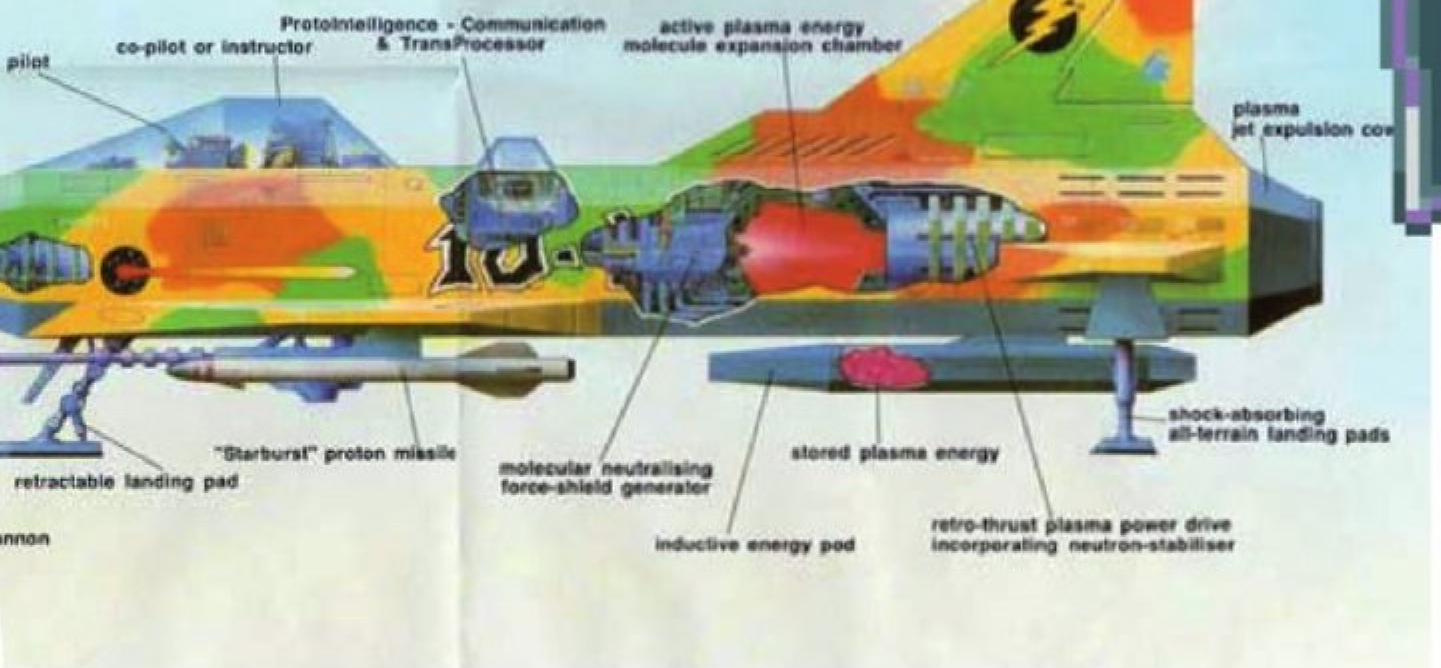
» [Apple II] The attract mode, looking not so attractive.



STARGLIDER









» **[Above]** This is your craft, the AGAV (Airborne Ground Attack Vehicle), a mean piece of kit fitted with Sapphire II quad pulse laser cannons. Bad news for those pesky Egrons. **[Left]** *Starglider* came packaged with an excellent novella by James Follett, which helped Jez San to shape the world and history within which the game was set.

Get Fresh

BROADCAST FROM A fictional space ship, the Millennium Dustbin, that travelled to a different location across the country each week, and presented by Gaz Top when he was still spiky, Charlotte Hindle, and mucus-dribbling puppet Gilbert the alien, ITV's *Get Fresh* featured the usual competitions and cartoons, but also a certain space-themed blaster.

"To be honest," Jez says, "I've no idea how it came about. I assume it was the awfully good chaps at Rainbird marketing who did that deal."

A specially modified version of *Starglider* was used as a regular feature, with contestants playing three-minute rounds. "They told me what to change and I made them a special version of the game. My friend Gary Sheinwald, who was my producer at Rainbird, spent every Saturday morning helping them get it going and sort it out so there were no problems. It was awesome that I could watch it every Saturday morning."

"others were buying cars and houses, whereas my cash was making better games"

they perhaps weren't, but who can forget that feeling of holding one of those huge boxes and letting the bottom half slide out? And how much sweeter was it when you found more than just a disk or two in there? Well, *Starglider* contained a novella, written by author James Follett.

"My and Follett's agent was Jacqui Lyons, a former literary agent who had decided to be the first agent in computer games," Jez explains. "It was Jacqui's idea to include the novella in the box, as it had been successfully done with *Elite* the previous year." (*Elite: The Dark Wheel*, written by late fantasy author Robert Holdstock, was packaged with most versions of *Elite*.) "James turned out to be an excellent choice, and he and I hit it off," Jez continues. "We bounced ideas off each other and he was involved early enough to influence the game design with his story, so it worked really well."

Starglider's story revolves around the Sentinels – automated robots charged with protecting the peaceful planet of Novenia, leaving the human residents free to do sci-fi stuff. But then the Sentinels went and accidentally blew up a load of deep-space migrating birds, the Stargliders, after mistaking them for enemy craft. The futuristic answer to Bill Oddie went nuts and the Sentinels were reprogrammed to not identify the birds as threats, allowing the nefarious Egrons to disguise their ships as Stargliders and attack. Luckily, Jason and Katra, technicians extraordinaire, were away on a moon at the time of the invasion and saw everything. Not best pleased, they got themselves into a space fighter pronto and the war was on.

"We tried to deeply embed the story into the game," Jez says, "but the story was definitely an afterthought. I was already a year or so into the game development before James got involved, but he certainly allowed me to change or justify other things, to fit in line with the story. And I sort of loved at the time that the hero was 'Jay-son', and my 'girlfriend' was Katra."

Still only 20 years old, the release of *Starglider* found Jez meeting with considerable success. Quite a lot for someone so young to deal with. And what did he do? What do you think?

"I bought a new car. It was a Renault 5 GT Turbo. Actually, I technically bought it with my advances cheque and I recall not driving it for the first week and letting my friends drive it, because I hadn't finished the game. As soon as the game shipped, I took it for a spin and boy was it a fun car. Very chuckable."

Not content with just points on his licence, though, Jez had his business head already firmly screwed on.

"My contemporaries like David Braben and Archer Maclean were enjoying the fruits of their labour and buying nice cars and houses with their royalty cheques, whereas my cash was going straight back into the company to fund the teams and make bigger and better games, so although *Starglider* grossed a large amount of money for a 20-year-old, it all went back into the company, Argonaut, to let us get an office, hire





the teams, buy some computers. I hadn't figured out at the time how to make any money personally. It didn't dawn on me until much later that you can sell a company or go public, thus justifying not taking any money out of the company and letting it ride for a few years."

"The game was a success," Gary says, "but back then there wasn't the same spotlight on unit sales, gross revenue and so on that the industry focuses on today. Also, back in those pioneering Rainbird days, I expected every game to be a success, and everything was pretty new and exciting. It was nice to see a game that I contributed to quite significantly win awards, though."

And would Gary change anything? "I don't think I would change anything significant, based on the parameters we were working with then: available time, and the limitations of the hardware. Probably just the stupid box cover art."

Since the days of *Starglider* and its sequel, Jez has continued to move through the gaming world, helping to set up TIGA – the national trade association set up to represent the interests of game developers in the UK – and founding online poker game company Crunchy Frog (later PKR) and, more recently, mobile applications developer Origin8. But it has been quite a while since he actually sat behind a computer and delved deep into the intricacies of coding for himself.

"I miss being hands-on," Jez admits, adding: "I'm still a geek at heart, though I get to do geeky things that are non-programming these days, like design most of the tech in my uber-wired home. I keep saying that one day I will start programming again. I liked being creative and solving problems that some thought insurmountable, like having 3D surround sound in a game encoded in real-time (*King Arthur's World*) or doing 3D real-time graphics on a 2D character-mapped game console (the SNES Super FX chip). 3D features quite heavily in my past. Many of the innovations I was involved with are 3D-related, even today with 3D poker. My proudest moments were creating things that made a big difference, either to the games players or the industry.

"Of course, my mum's proudest moment was when I received an OBE from Prince Charles at Buckingham Palace." An OBE for videogames? Oh, yes! Jez San got himself one of them…

"It's sort of surreal that the government at a moment in time decided to reward someone from the game industry with such an honour," he says. "Yet again, like when I got into computer games in the first place, I was in the right place at the right time. I was one of those who was doing my bit for the industry at the time. I helped form TIGA – heck, I even came up with the name – And I was regularly giving talks at conferences and universities. I was also lucky enough to have had a company – actually two – go public and make me some cash, so I wasn't trying to profit from the industry and was in a mood to give as much back as I could. I guess this got noticed and I ended up first in line for an OBE, which was a wonderful honour and something to show the grandkids one day." *

Special thanks to Chris Wilkins for putting us in touch with Jez San, and to Richard Hewison of **birdsanctuary.co.uk** for his invaluable help with images and helping us to contact Gary Sheinwald.



the good, the bad, and the C64 conversion

STARGLIDER APPEARED ON the Amiga, Atari ST, Spectrum, CPC, Mac, DOS, C64 and others. Most were well received. But let's not talk about the C64 version.

"I did the ST and Amiga versions myself," Jez says. "I should've done the Mac version too, but let someone else do it. The rest were done by other coding groups…"

Oh, go on, then. What about that C64 version? While *Elite* had demonstrated that Commodore's beauty had the guts to pull off a game like this, the C64 version just lacks in all departments. Slow, dull and lacking the speech and extra missions, this was a sorry job by dev Solid Image. *Zzap!64* said of its £15 price: "That's a high expenditure for slick packaging and a mediocre game."

"The C64 version was pretty difficult, done by Glyn Williams and Joey at Solid Image. I agree it wasn't great, but how much of that was the fact that the machine was very underpowered? Glyn and Joey were excellent programmers and went on to do better things."





» [Amiga] *Starglider 2* was even more advanced than the first game, but was released using the ill-fated Argonaut Dual Loading System.



» [Spectrum] The Spectrum game was probably the best of the 8-bit versions. Sleek, fast, and with digitised speech and extra missions, it was a deserved *Crash* Smash.



3D Deathchase

NOT BAD FOR A LITTLE FURBALL…

» RETROREVIVAL

» ZX SPECTRUM
» MICROMEGA
» 1983

If you were young – or young at heart – in the early Eighties and ever set foot inside a cinema, chances are you spent quite a bit of time fantasising about riding some kind of futuristic bike at breakneck speed, zig-zagging your way past lethal obstacles.

You'd watched Jeff Bridges on his Light Cycle in *Tron* and, of course, a thrilling speeder bike chase in *Return Of The Jedi*. You wanted a 'future bike' of your own. Luckily, thanks to the coding genius of Mervyn Estcourt, ZX Spectrum owners could get similar exhilaration in front of their tele-boxes: his exercise in wish-fulfilment that provided such thrills was *3D Deathchase* – or *Deathchase* to its friends, and to those people who put the game's title screen above its dodgy box art.

The story is that everyone blew each other to bits in 'the Great War', leaving warlords battling for control in whatever's left of North America, which is now apparently covered in huge forests. So far, so much like just about any modern first-person shooter. You take the role of an elite mercenary, patrolling day and night, blowing up enemy bikers for a grand a pop and trying not to turn yourself into a mercenary pizza by slamming into a tree. Helpfully, the other riders and the occasional tanks and helicopters that pop up on the horizon aren't armed, and merely try to flee. It's best not to think about that while you're mercilessly murdering them to death for a boost to your bank account.

At the time, the game was amazing: fast, responsive and squeezed into just 16KB. A decade later, it proudly topped *Your Sinclair*'s top 100 list, fending off the likes of *Stop The Express* and *Head Over Heels*, and it still impresses today. Although the graphics are basic and the buzzing audio's annoying, you soon get lost as you zoom deeper into the ever-thickening forest, blowing away bikers and trying to avoid getting a mouthful of tree. Hopefully, one day **Retro Gamer** will be able to get the full story, if we can track down the elusive Mr Estcourt. For now, there are trees to get embedded in at high speed. *


HI:000000
[]RANGE

RETRORATED



>> It's clearly a month of comebacks, with a return of retro collections, Quake and the Back To The Future series, which receives a brand new narrative chapter courtesy of Telltale Games. We also review Cave Story and offer a rundown of the month's download offerings...

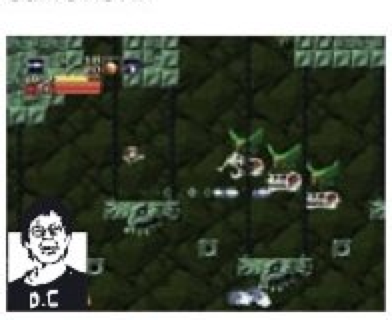
PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Neo Geo Station
Some of the games are expensive, but the gameplay and presentation are superb.



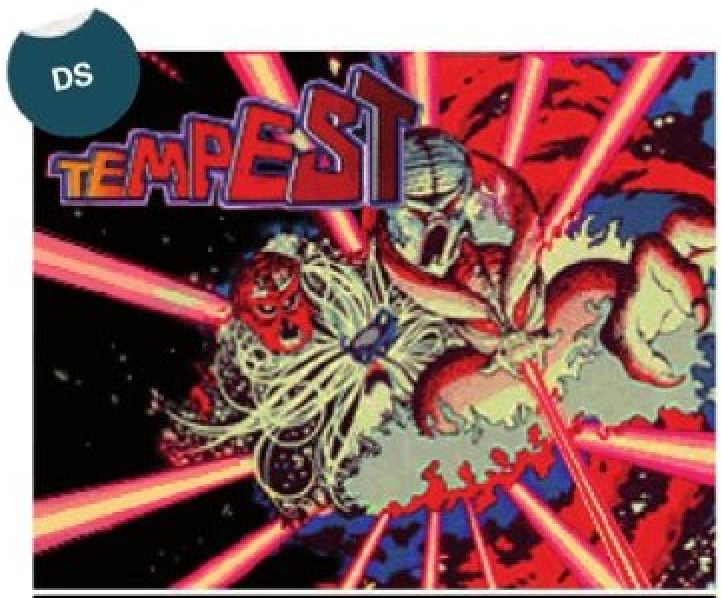
STUART
Cave Story
It has to be *Cave Story* for me. If you want to find out why, read our review.



DAVID
Cave Story
It's taken forever to finally appear on the Wii, but the wait has definitely been worth it.

>> ATARI GREATEST HITS VOLUME 1

DS







Atari Greatest Hits Volume 1

FEATURING SUCH HITS AS VIDEO CHECKERS, SLOT MACHINE AND FUN WITH NUMBERS

INFORMATION

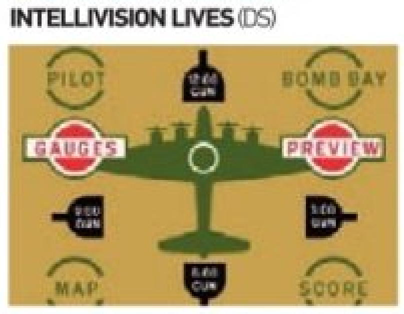
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £24.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- » **DEVELOPER:** CODE MYSTICS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Founded by Jeff Vavasour, a founder of Backbone Entertainment, Code Mystics is a cross-platform developer comprising a number of staffers who have worked on retro compilations. Since forming in 2009, Code Mystics has released *Atari Classic Arcade* and *Dragon's Lair* for DSiWare.

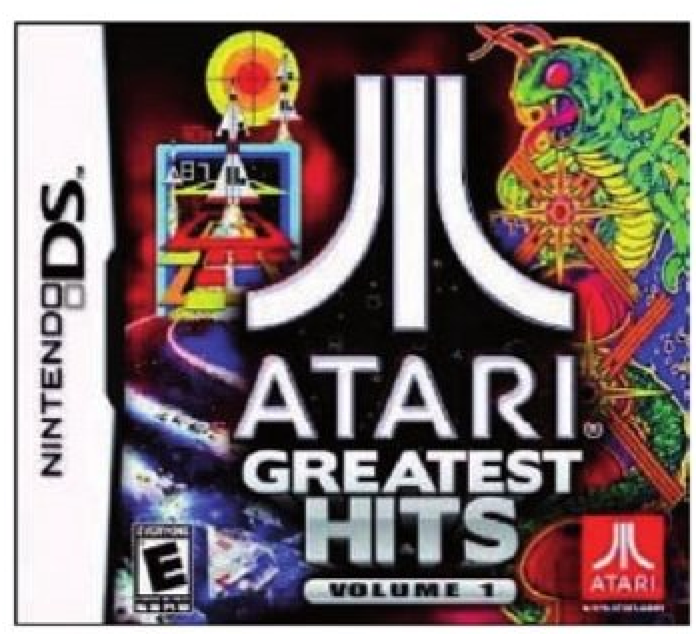
WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
INTELLIVISION LIVES (DS)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
IREM ARCADE HITS (PC)







It seems an age since we last reviewed a retro compilation pack and then this month two come along at once. This probably means one of two things: either veteran game developers have finally found themselves running out of classic games to re-release, or they're simply taking more care and attention over producing their retro collections. Well, given the fact that this latest DS-only collection features a large portion of Atari 2600 games that make you question the 'Greatest Hits' part of its title, you'd be forgiven for thinking it sits well inside the former camp, but in actual fact it kind of straddles both sides of the divide.

It must be said that this collection features many games that you will probably only play once, possibly twice, in your life – *Math Grand Prix*, we're looking at you – and three titles in the *Swordquest* series that are pretty much rendered unplayable owing to Atari and Code Mystics' failure to include the accompanying comic books needed to actually complete the games. And it could have easily been done, seeing as each Atari 2600 game comes with a full scan of its manual. Even so, this is nevertheless a nicely put together retro collection that is easily up there with the quality of the best recent examples like *Konami Arcade Collection* and *Namco Museum DS*.

As words are short, we'll simply fire at you the most salient good and not so good points about this particular collection. The 50 games that feature are split into two sections: arcade and Atari 2600. The arcade section provides a decent mixture of nine games, most familiar (*Asteroids*, *Centipede*) and a couple not so (*Gravitar*, *Space Duel*). With each game emulated using Code Mystics' fancy-sounding 'FOCAL emulation

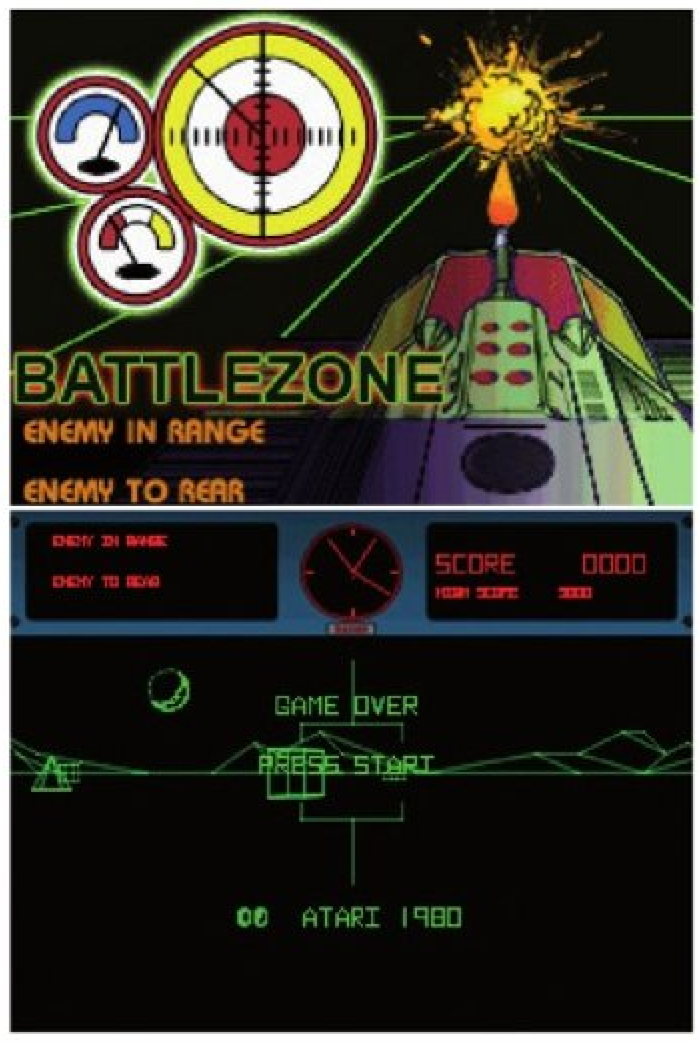




» [DS] Both *Missile Command* and *Centipede* offer trackball controls, but the control system doesn't work all that brilliantly to be honest.

technology' to authentically mimic the look of their arcade parent, the games certainly look the part, particularly those with vector graphics, but unfortunately a few come unstuck displayed on the DS's small screen – in particular *Gravitar*, which we found pretty much unplayable without reading glasses. And while it's clear that a lot of effort has been made by Code Mystics to ensure that this pack not only looks but also 'feels' authentic, the stubby and twee DS buttons feel unstable playing button-abusing shooters like *Centipede* or *Tempest*. Conversely, the fine precision offered by the console's touch-screen controls work really well in *Lunar Lander* and *Missile Command*, although the virtual trackball control option, which isn't compatible with fingers, feels a bit needless given that basically all it does is restrict control to a small round area of the screen.

The 40-some games making up the 2600 section of the pack are, as you would expect, a bit of a mixed bag. Save for the *Realsports* titles, most of the games are very basic. Although that's not necessarily a bad thing: if you're looking for a pack of games that you can pick up and play, or pass and play, or even play and then pass and then replay, there's a lot here that fits that bill. *Human Cannonball*, *Bowling*, *Outlaw* and *Surround* may be ridiculously simplistic titles but do offer short bursts of fun, and something that did impress us about this collection is how the befuddling means to access the different game modes in some 2600 games has been well-handled. With the gameplay projected on the top DS screen, and an easy-to-navigate interface inspired by the Atari 2600 dashboard displayed on the bottom, players can easily toggle between the game options and difficulty settings using the stylus, and a description of each selection is thoughtfully projected on screen so that you're clear on exactly what mode it is you're tweaking.



» [DS] Atari fans will probably snap this pack up just to play *Battlezone*, even if it is a bit dry.

Add to this a few bonuses by way of a fun little trivia game – although we did find it started repeating questions quite quickly – along with a previously unreleased Atari 2600 prototype of *Tempest* and the *Bradley Trainer* version of *Battlezone*, the latter of which is available to play outside the US Army for the first time ever, and here stands an impressive collection that any self-respecting Atari fan has probably already purchased.

OPINION



Effortlessly making Game Room look hideously overpriced, this is a more than worthy compilation of past Atari classics that all fans should consider. We'd have liked a better mix of arcade and 2600 games, but it's still a good pack.

Darran Jones



In a nutshell

A varied and large selection of games, nicely put together interface, and a few nice surprises too. Code Mystics can be applauded for delivering a solid Atari compilation. We look forward to seeing what it puts into the next volume.

>> Scores

Presentation	85%
Graphics	80%
Sound	63%
Playability	70%
Addictivity	75%
Overall	**80%**

✱ VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> There's no better medium to find all your favourite retro games than the various download services. Here are this month's new additions

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Finally! After what feels like an age, Nintendo has realised that it has a digital service dedicated to downloading classic games. Here's hoping that the additional releases weren't just a result of the Christmas period.

Magical Drop II
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Points:** 900
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Karnov's Revenge
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Points:** 900
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Super Bonk
» **System:** SNES
» **Points:** 800
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Commando
» **System:** Arcade
» **Points:** 800
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

PC

It's been a relatively quiet month on PC services. We've discovered the joys of DotEmu and spent far too much money in the Steam sale on new games. Saying that, we still have a large backlog of classic *D&D* games to get through.

Alien Shooter + Expansions
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $5.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆



Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars + Director's Cut
» **Service:** GOG
» **Price:** $5.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★★
» Now here's a bargain. In addition to giving you the director's cut of hit point-and-click adventure *Broken Sword*, GOG has also included the original, arguably better version, completely free of charge.

Europa 1400 Gold Edition
» **Service:** DotEmu
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Painkiller: Black Edition
» **Service:** DotEmu
» **Price:** $6.99
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Dark Fall: The Journal
» **Service:** DotEmu
» **Price:** $9.99
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

Neo Geo Station finally hits PSN, and it is every bit as good as we were hoping for. The presentation is glorious and the ports are arcade perfect, but the price will be too high for some and network play needs improving dramatically. Still, it's a great start. Let's hope it's better supported than Game Room has been.

Alpha Mission II
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Art Of Fighting
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Baseball Stars Professional
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Fatal Fury
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

League Bowling
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Magician Lord
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Metal Slug
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★★★★

Samurai Shodown
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

Streak: Hoverboard Racing
» **System:** PSone
» **Price:** £3.19
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Super Sidekicks
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

The King Of Fighters 94
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Price:** £7.19
» **Rating:** ★★★★☆

GAME ROOM

Oh Game Room, how you continue to disappoint us. Despite finally releasing a batch of excellent arcade games, many of them are far from complete due to inferior or missing sound and other issues. There's no denying that they're great games, of course, but we've knocked off a star or two to show our disappointment.

✱ All games are 240 Points

Amidar
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Off The Wall
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Twinbee
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Detana!! Twinbee
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Pooyan
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

Thwocker
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Food Fight
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

MIA
» **System:** Arcade
» **Rating:** ★★☆☆☆

Spiker! Vollyball
» **System:** Intellivision
» **Rating:** ★☆☆☆☆

Warlords
» **System:** Atari 2600
» **Rating:** ★★★☆☆

>> BACK TO THE FUTURE THE GAME EPISODE 1: IT'S ABOUT TIME

Back To The Future
The Game Episode 1: It's About Time

WE FINALLY GET A GOOD BACK TO THE FUTURE GAME. IT'S ABOUT TIME…

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £14.99 » **PUBLISHER:** TELLTALE GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1

PC



» [PC] The characterisations are excellent, and Michael J Fox's stand-in is very good.



After breathing fresh life into both the *Monkey Island* and *Sam & Max* franchises, Telltale Games has now turned its attention to one of the Eighties' greatest adventure films.

Set six months after the events of *Back To The Future Part III*, Marty is helping his father clear out Doc's belongings when the DeLorean turns up. Marty soon discovers that the errant time traveller has got himself into another jam, and Marty has to travel back to 1931 and stop him from getting lynched by an angry mob.

To say any more would ruin the story, but suffice to say that *It's About Time* is a loving homage to the classic films, with plenty of clever twists and turns and several new characters, and further fleshes out those you fell in love with during the original trilogy.

Gameplay-wise, *It's About Time* plays very similarly to previous Telltale



efforts, and it's here where the game begins to fall down somewhat. While we've no problem with Telltale's approach to episodic gaming, the vast majority of *It's About Time*'s puzzles are very simplistic, meaning the game can be breezed through in a few short hours. The lack of time-based puzzles also annoys, although we're sure this will be rectified in later episodes.

It's About Time isn't perfect by any stretch – simply moving Marty around is just as painful as in previous Telltale games – but it serves as a great introduction. Roll on *Episode 2*.

OPINION



Back To The Future is, without exaggeration, my favourite film of all time, so I've been really looking forward to this one. As a continuation of the story, I'm not disappointed. It feels authentic and faithful, but as a gamer I could have done with a little more challenge.

Ashley Day

>> Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	78%
Sound	88%
Playability	78%
Addictivity	70%

Overall 71%

Wii Ware



» [Wii] Many of the bosses require switching through different weapons in order to defeat them. Tread carefully.

Cave Story

METROIDVANIA'S CUTE KID FINALLY HITS THE WII

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** WIIWARE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1,000 POINTS (£7) » **PUBLISHER:** NICALIS » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



After falling in love with the PC version many years ago, this new WiiWare release has reminded us just how brilliant *Cave Story* actually is.

Even now, some seven years after its initial release, *Cave Story* feels refreshingly different and is a masterclass in tight game design. Borrowing elements from everything from *Metroid* to the later *Castlevania* games, it's a wondrous blend of platforming, exploration and shooting, and it's beautifully balanced to boot.

The whimsical plot also borrows heavily from numerous other games, but the crux of it involves a mistaken abduction, a town full of rabbit creatures and an evil doctor. It's nutty, but it's so charming that you'll follow it through to its admittedly clichéd end.

It matters not, though, for cliques aside, *Cave Story* is an amazingly charming game that's full of clever ideas and fantastic level design.



Weapons can be secured and gradually powered up by collecting yellow shards – a nice touch has weapons levelling down as you take more damage – and additional items can be collected to open up new areas, while there's a range of weird and wonderful characters to interact with.

Add in some gorgeous 8-bit-styled visuals and a range of additional gameplay modes, including a boss rush and time attack, and *Cave Story* remains as fresh and exciting today as it was in 2004. An essential download for Wii owners everywhere.

OPINION



While it's not the most original of titles, *Cave Story* is put together with so much love that it's hard to not be impressed by it. Delightful to look at and hugely challenging, it's a great addition to the Wii's library and will be enjoyed by anyone with a sense of adventure.

Darran Jones

>> Scores

Presentation	80%
Graphics	85%
Sound	82%
Playability	97%
Addictivity	94%

Overall 94%

Quake Arena Arcade

NO PERKS, NO UNLOCKS, NO MERCY

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS (£10.20) » **PUBLISHER:** BETHESDA » **DEVELOPER:** PI STUDIOS » **PLAYERS:** 1-16



There's something immensely satisfying about returning to *Quake III Arena* after all this time. Devoid of all the gimmicks that now come with modern day first-person shooters like *Call Of Duty: Black Ops* and *Medal Of Honor, Quake Arena Arcade* feels refreshingly old school, and it's all the better for it.

The most impressive aspect of *Quake Arena Arcade* is just how well-designed the levels still are. Amazingly chaotic when you're playing with 15 other people, the claustrophobic settings are brilliantly designed and ensure that your adrenaline is constantly pumping. The included weapons are also a joy to use, thanks to superb balancing and the fact that they feel so meaty when you're firing them.

Sadly, while the multiplayer remains as fun now as it was in 1999, the vast majority of today's gamers don't appear to agree, as it's becoming harder and harder to find a full room, despite the fact that it's not been out very long. It's hardly the publisher's fault, although we would argue that more people might be tempted to pick it up if it came with a more sensible price tag.

That aside, *Quake Arena Arcade* is still great fun to play. The lack of a level editor smarts – there are 12 new levels to make up for the reams of content available for the original PC outing, though – and the single-player experience is dire, but if you can find a group of friends, you'll rediscover one of the best online experiences around.

>> Scores

Presentation	65%
Graphics	80%
Sound	72%
Playability	88%
Addictivity	78%

Overall 82%

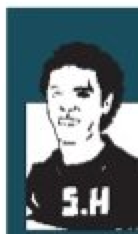
XBLA



» [360] The game moves too fast for the aged graphics engine to be shown up too badly.



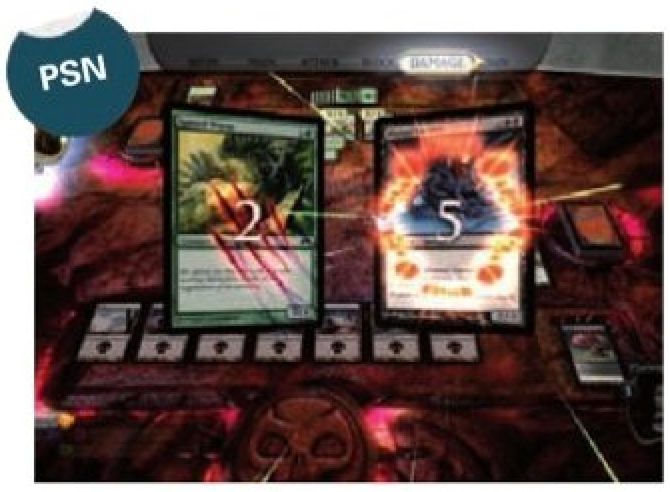
OPINION



Considering the free PC version that's available to play, 1,200 Points seems insanely overpriced. Having said that, *Quake Arena Arcade* remains as polished as ever and it's a great and entertaining blaster. Just be sure you can find someone to play with.

Stuart Hunt

PSN



Magic: The Gathering Duels Of The Planeswalkers

» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **It pales in** comparison to the proper card game, but *Duels Of The Planeswalkers* is a great introduction to the world of *Magic: The Gathering*. The lack of proper deck editing is frustrating, but a good selection of decks to choose from, a fun puzzle mode that has you solving half-completed games, and the ability to play online definitely makes this worth the £8 asking price.

>> Score **80%**

PC



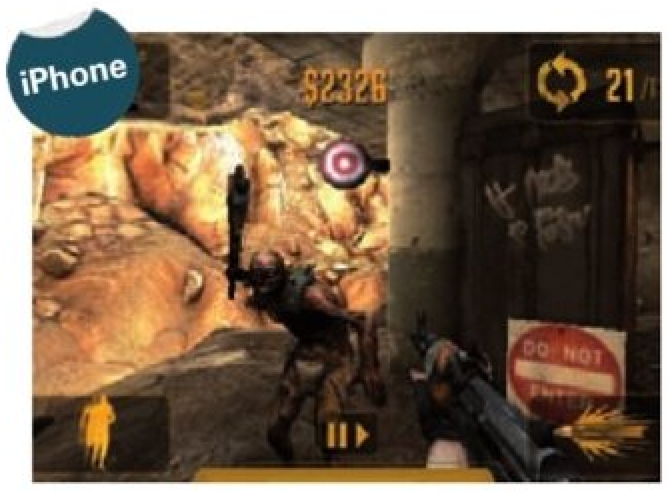
Bejeweled 3

» **SYSTEM:** PC
» **PRICE:** £14.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **It's been a** decade since PopCap came up with the concept of *Bejeweled* and very little has changed in the last ten years. The match-three idea remains hellishly addictive, and PopCap has included a number of new game modes to spice the basic action up, including a fun variation of poker and a new fast-paced time trial option, but there's no escaping the fact that it feels like you've played it all before.

>> Score **82%**

iPhone



Rage HD

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE
» **PRICE:** £1.19 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **John Carmack's latest** game not only pushes the iPhone to its graphical limits, but is also a surprisingly refreshing blaster. An old-fashioned on-rails shooter at heart – albeit one with gorgeous visuals – *Rage HD* may be incredibly linear and lacking in depth, but it is also a hell of a lot of fun to play. The perfect blaster for whenever you have a spare ten minutes to kill and a nice taster for the upcoming full game.

>> Score **76%**

iPhone



Capcom Arcade

» **SYSTEM:** IPHONE
» **PRICE:** FREE » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Imagine a virtual** arcade full of classic Capcom games. Sounds great, doesn't it? Sadly, like Game Room, Capcom's new iPhone venture is a missed opportunity due to overpriced games, additional in-app purchases and clunky controls. Six games are currently supported including *Street Fighter II*, *1943* and *Commando*, and while the emulation is pretty impressive, the iPhone just can't do them justice.

>> Score **44%**

>> IREM ARCADE HITS

INFORMATION

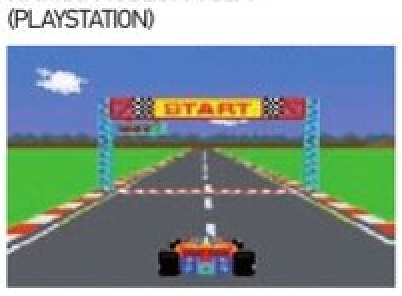
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** $14.99 (WWW.IREM-ARCADE-HITS.COM)
- » **PUBLISHER:** DOTEMU
- » **DEVELOPER:** IREM
- » **PLAYERS:** 1+

BRIEF HISTORY

» Irem was set up in 1974 and was originally known as IPM (International Playing Machine). While one of its most successful early games was the arcade blaster *Moon Patrol*, it is best known for the *R-Type* series. Its last home release was *R-Type Tactics II: Operation Bitter Chocolate* in 2009.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
NAMCO MUSEUM VOL 1 (PLAYSTATION)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
SEGA MEGA DRIVE ULTIMATE COLLECTION (XBOX 360)



GO DEEPER

The facts behind Irem Arcade Hits

>> **Irem's very first arcade game was called *IPM Invader* and was released in 1979.**

>> **It's best known for the excellent *R-Type* series. Released in 1987, *R-Type* went on to spawn ten sequels and spin-offs.**

THE GAMES

- Air Duel
- Battle Chopper
- Blade Master
- Cosmic Cop
- Dragon Breed
- Gun Force
- Gun Force II
- Hammerin Harry
- Image Fight
- In The Hunt
- Kung Fu Master
- The Legend Of Hero Tonma
- Mystic Riders
- Ninja Spirit
- R-Type Leo
- Superior Soldier
- Undercover Cops
- Vigilante



» [PC] Frustratingly, Irem has included the inferior Western version of *Undercover Cops*. The included Japanese ROM can't be accessed.

IREM GOES BACK TO BASICS

Irem Arcade Hits



Having a PC Irem compilation that doesn't include the original *R-Type* is like trying to make a Ferrari with no wheels: it looks great but seems rather pointless.

Kudos to DotEmu for bravely releasing a compilation on a system that's rife with piracy, but it's going to have to work a little harder if it wants to convert the retro faithful. Even though *Irem Arcade Hits* is a surprisingly good compendium of classic games, there's no escaping that this is nothing more than a simple ROM dump, with a vaguely slick front-end and a smattering of decent options.

Cynicism aside, though, there's no denying that *Irem Arcade Hits* does include a great range of games from the company's 37-year history. Yes, *R-Type* hasn't made the cut, but we do get the rather excellent *R-Type Leo* – the first time it's ever had a commercial home release – *Kung Fu Master, Image Fight, Ninja Spirit, Dragon Breed, Mr Heli, In The Hunt* and much, much more. In short, 18 games have been included and each and every one of them is fully customisable, allowing you to reconfigure buttons and add scanlines to ensure a more authentic arcade experience.

The range of games heavily leans towards the shmup genre – another reason why we're rather keen on it – but also includes platformers, scrolling fighters and a decent range of run-and-guns. There's something for everyone, and at around 50 pence a game it's very hard to complain about the price point.

Admittedly you can argue that this would be much better on the home consoles, and that you may as well play the games, albeit illegally, on MAME, but when a developer does release a genuinely decent range of games, it seems churlish to not support it. While *Irem Arcade Hits* is just as lazily put together as Nintendo's recently released *Super Mario All-Stars* collection, at least it's not trying to hide it behind some rather flimsy extras.

Yes, it's lazy, and yes, its PC origins mean that it's not going to reach anywhere near the audience that it deserves to, but we still feel that *Irem Arcade Hits* is worth a tenner. And who knows? It may even lead to a home console release.


» [PC] There's a great range of genres represented on *Irem Arcade Hits*. This is the rather funky *Ninja Spirit*.




» [PC] The lack of *R-Type* smarts, but *R-Type Leo* is a more than worthy substitute.



OPINION



It's amazingly basic, but that's not to say this isn't an enjoyable compilation. It's annoying that the superior Japanese version of *Undercover Cops* can't be accessed – especially as the ROM is included – but it's still a fun compilation and well worth its £10 asking price.

Stuart Hunt

In a nutshell

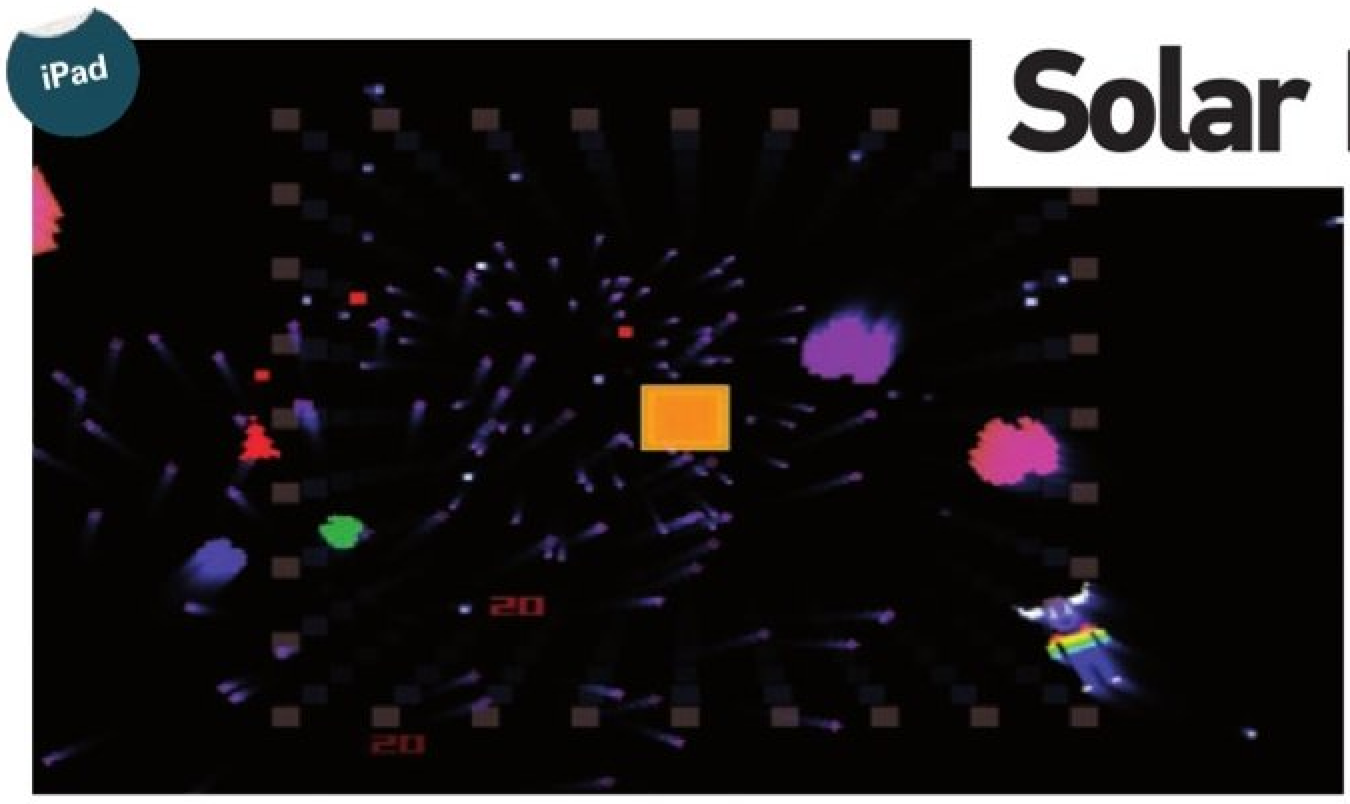
Yes, it hasn't been put together with much thought, but it's a sensible price, has a host of enjoyable games and is easily configurable for both keyboard and gamepad.

>> Scores

Presentation	**30%**
Graphics	**75%**
Sound	**70%**
Playability	**90%**
Addictivity	**94%**

Overall 72%

iPad



Solar Minotaur Rescue Frenzy

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** IPAD » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** IPHONE » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £0.59 » **PUBLISHER:** LLAMASOFT » **DEVELOPER:** JEFF MINTER » **PLAYERS:** 1-4 (1-2 ON IPHONE)



Effectively a cross between *Space Wars* and *Asteroids*, the aim of Jeff Minter's first iOS game is to stop minotaurs and space debris from getting sucked into the sun in the middle of the screen. This is done by deftly moving your ship with little swipes to change its direction. It's a masterful little system and feels wonderfully intuitive.

Getting close to the sun serves two purposes: one is that it increases the strength and rate of your ship's fire; the other is that the sun's gravitational pull will attempt to consume you and also bends your bullets. It's certainly not a new idea, but it's nicely implemented here, as you'll score more points for minotaurs you pluck from the brink of death. Things get further complicated, thanks to small saucers that drop deadly mines that kill you on contact (you otherwise have 3 shields) and the sun itself, which eventually turns into a black hole as it swallows more asteroids.

What a pity, then, that the fun gameplay is let down by an insane difficulty spike that hits once you get past the tenth stage. This in itself would be fine, but the jump-start system, which isn't a patch on *Space Giraffe*'s, is rather weak, as you can gain more points by simply trudging through the earlier stages.

There's no denying that *Solar Minotaur Rescue Frenzy* is an addictive shoot-'em-up. It's just not as good as you'd expect from someone who has continually excelled within the genre.



» [iPad] Fly into the sun and you'll immediately lose a life.

OPINION



While the difficulty certainly annoys, Jeff Minter has still managed to craft a game that's ridiculously addictive to play, with a host of game modes. It's not close to the majesty of *Space Giraffe* but is still a great shooter, albeit an unfairly tough one.

Stuart Hunt

>> Scores

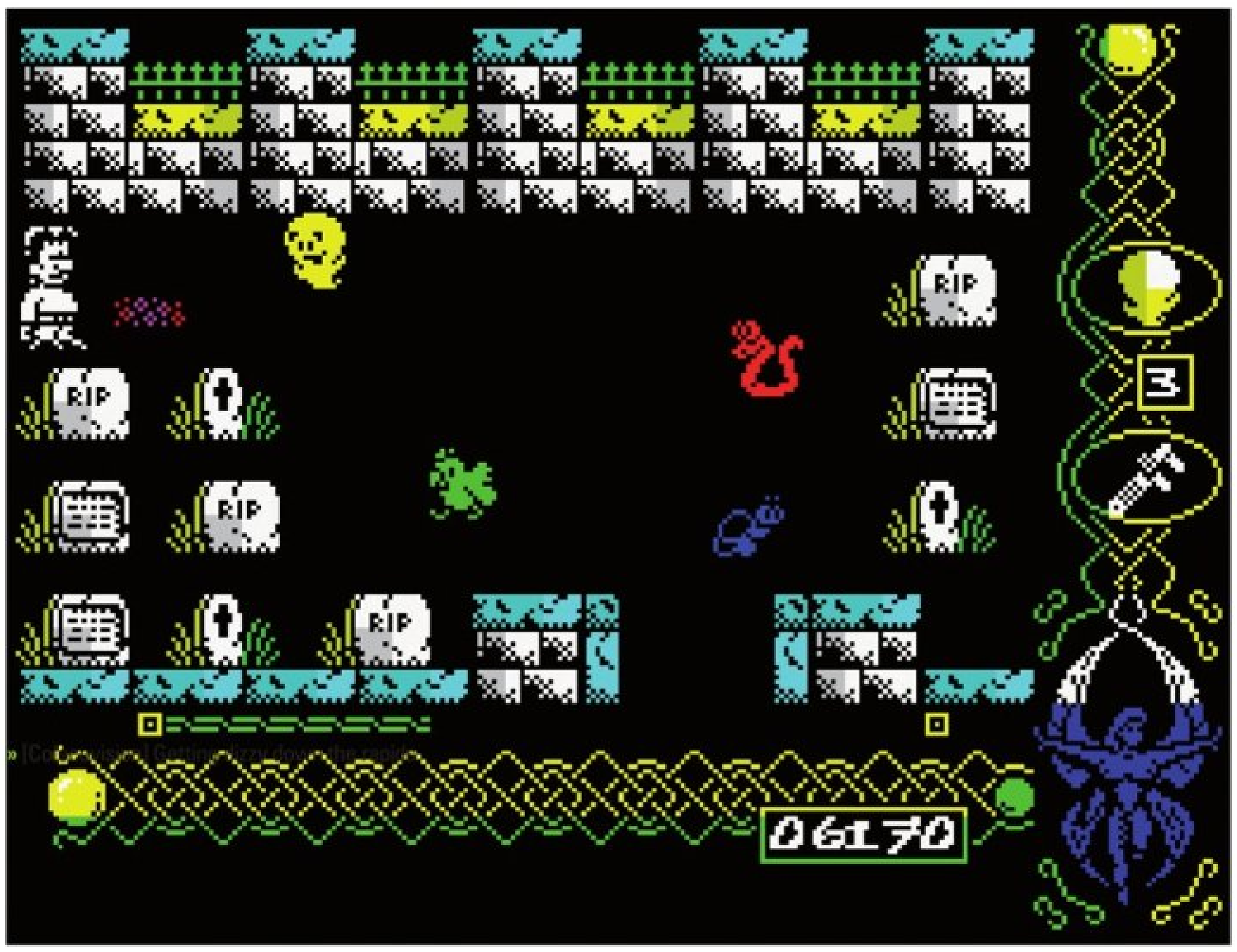
Presentation	75%
Graphics	80%
Sound	68%
Playability	82%
Addictivity	87%
Overall	**84%**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



As I was getting ready to send this off, I realised that, during my 'research' for the *Rocky Memphis* and *Ghost Castle 2* reviews, I managed to complete both; that means my avatar 'travelled' through over 850 locations. When you consider that I've been known to lose focus and get lost while walking to the supermarket, that's pretty good going!





» [Spectrum] Runs like a spirit by the castle walls.



» [Spectrum] No sign of Derek Griffiths?

GHOST CASTLE 2

SPOOKS AND GHOULS AND FREAKS AND FOOLS



» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** THE BOG BROTHERS
» **LINK:** HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/GC2
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2010
» **PRICE:** FREE

After his first outing in *Ghost Castle,* Gene the ghost is back for more in the sequel, which was released at R3PLAY at the start of November 2010. The original game saw Gene trying to escape from the castle and this next instalment picks up where that left off as he goes in search of the crypt containing his body along with some magical means to cram his spirit back into it.

The castle grounds contain over 250 locations including the crypt itself and aren't deserted – brightly coloured ethereal enemies which only serve to get in Gene's way and sap his life force materialise in swirling energy vortexes before bouncing around the screen and exploding in puffs of magical flame when shot.

The map is divided into four distinct sections, the entrance to each being closely guarded by a creature of the night – of course vampires, werewolves and monsters assembled from body parts by mad scientists all have their weak points, so Gene will need to search his surroundings to acquire an object that exploits these vulnerabilities in order to proceed. There are four seemingly abandoned treasure chests dotted around each chunk of the map, two of which were presumably plundered ages ago and left empty while the third contains the required item and the forth a disembodied hand that will toss a coin and, if the correct face is selected by the player beforehand, award an extra life.

That large map is quite literally a maze and, since some of the locations look rather similar and the items Gene needs are randomly assigned to the chests at the start of play, he'll need to do quite a bit of backtracking while locating them so getting hopelessly lost is something of an occupational hazard. Indulging in the noble gaming art of drawing a map of the rooms and how they connect is certainly worth doing with *Ghost Castle 2* (either that or sneakily borrowing the one that's been stitched together from screenshots that World of Spectrum kindly provide on their download page).

The solid programming means that the later screens can become quite busy without issue and, although they're repeated quite a bit due to the scale of the map, the graphics are well-defined, colourful and, in the case of the sprites, decently animated as well. Since this is a 48K game it sports a beeper-powered title tune and a light smattering of chirpy in-game spot effects, but that sparseness manages to add to the charm of the overall package rather than detract from it.

Ghost Castle 2 is very reminiscent of classic Spectrum exploration games such as *Sabre Wulf* or *Firelord* – both aesthetically and in the way it plays – so really wouldn't have felt out of place being released by a top-tier Spectrum publisher like Ultimate or Hewson back in the day. Pick a good CD to listen to during play, have pen and paper ready and help poor Gene the ghost find himself.

94%



» [Spectrum] An important-looking shiny thing!



» [Spectrum] Creep into the crypt.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

GENESIS: DAWN OF A NEW DAY

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM 128K » **DEVELOPER:** RETROWORKS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/GENESIS » **PRICE:** FREE

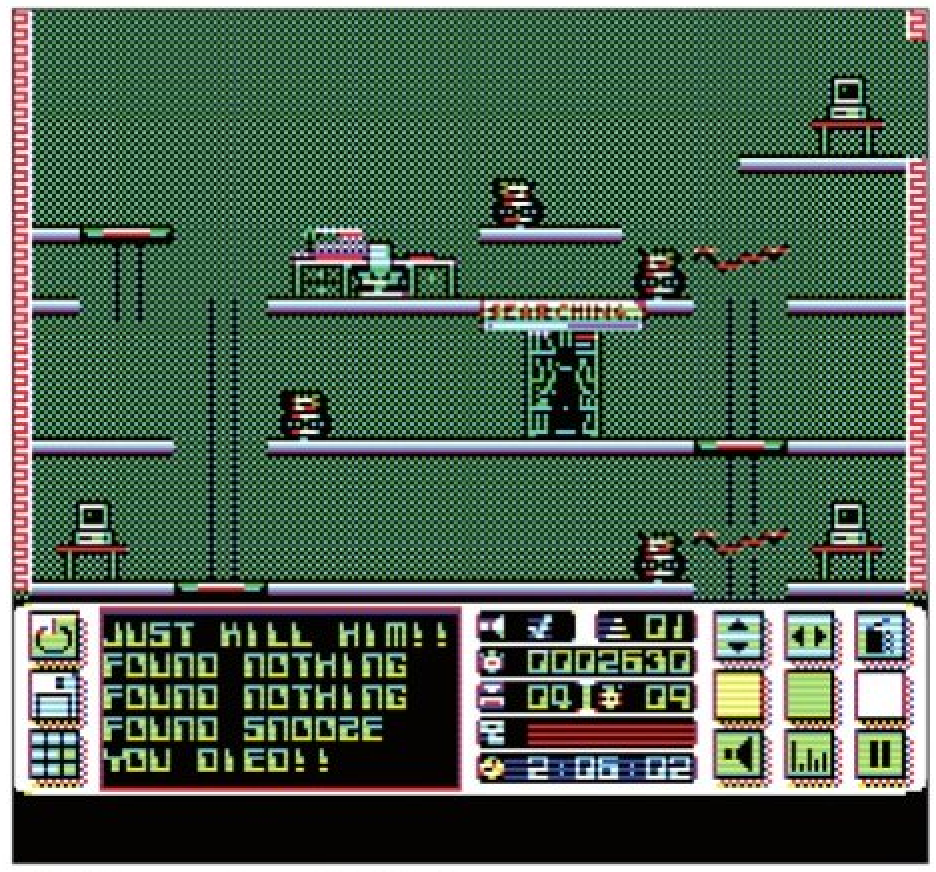
The Earth has fallen to the Dorks and, since being subjugated by a race of aliens with such a ridiculous name is just too much to bear, a lone pilot is sent to fight his way clear of Earth to collect and assemble parts of the legendary super spaceship Genesis from five worlds, before flying it home for the final confrontation with the Dork leader. Yes, this is a new scrolling shoot-'em-up for the 128K Spectrum that is reminiscent of the budget blaster *Chronos* and we don't see those released very often!

The detailed graphics scroll past smoothly, although having everything rendered in a single colour does make spotting one particularly nasty enemy that leaps from the ground as the ship passes by difficult. But while it might not be perfect, *Genesis: Dawn Of A New Day* does put up a good fight – even more so if the inertial controls are left enabled – and has been well put together with great presentation.

86%

» [Spectrum] You never know who's looking on.





» [Oric] Have you got a copy of *Fly Fishing*?

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

» **FORMAT:** ORIC ATMOS » **DEVELOPER:** TWILIGHTE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ORIC-IM » **PRICE:** FREE

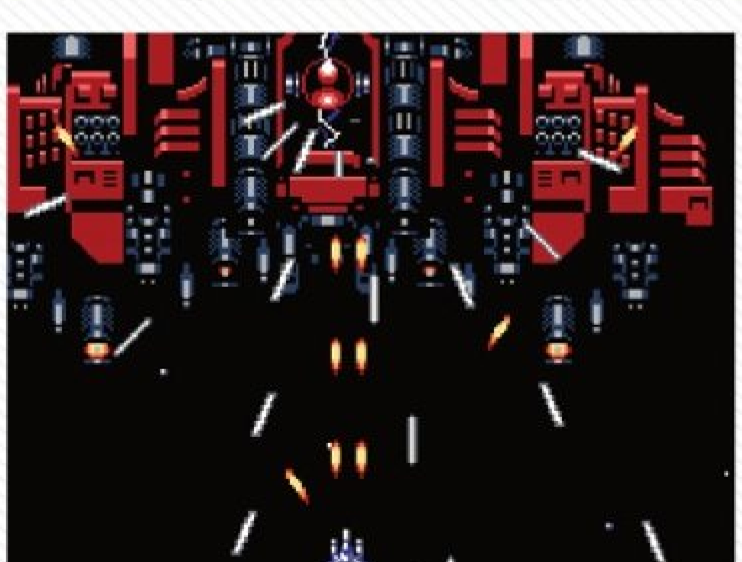
Professor Alvin Atombender is an insane genius on a mission; he's been toiling away in his nuclear bunker, breaking into military computers and, if intelligence reports are correct, plans to use them to launch a missile attack that will destroy the world. There are just six hours on the clock before the fireworks start and it's down to an unnamed agent to enter Alvin's stronghold, search for the secret codes to unlock the bunker and save humanity.

The agent's latest outing on the Oric Atmos is based on the Commodore 64 game and, although he does move slightly differently, his famed acrobatics are present and correct. As with the original, the layout of the rooms are tortuous and that seemingly vast time limit will be quickly whittled away as ten minutes are lost for each death. After *Stormlord* pushed the bar skywards for Oric games technically, the sprite flicker and occasional colour clash in *Impossible Mission* are distracting, but if the visual hiccups are ignored it's a well constructed, playable platformer.

83%

BLADE BUSTER

» **FORMAT:** NES » **DEVELOPER:** HIGH LEVEL CHALLENGE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BLADEBUSTER » **PRICE:** FREE



» [NES] Hello mother, hello father.

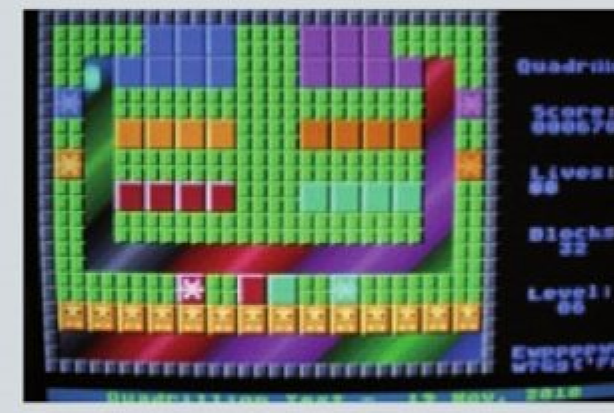
There are only two levels with a boss each in *Blade Buster*, but because it's a score attack shoot-'em-up the objective is to battle through either the first level in two minutes or both in five while racking up the highest score. Points are awarded for just about everything shot or collected, there are a few concealed bonuses to locate and the red pods disgorge vital power-ups.

Completing either mode shouldn't tax many blasting fans, but the real challenge lies in getting an impressive score while dodging anything nasty, since collisions downgrade weaponry until there's nothing left, at which point a life and some precious time are lost. *Blade Buster* makes good use of the hardware and the action is frenetic and relentless. Fans of fast-paced NES shooters like *Star Soldier* or *Recca* should find the challenge of *Blade Buster* enjoyable.

88%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Atari 8-bit] Putting the VBXE 2 hardware to good use.

>> Breakout, meet puzzle game

Quadrillion for the Commodore 16, a cross between a puzzle game and a *Breakout* variant where the player has direct control of the ball's horizontal movement while it ping pongs vertically, turned six during 2010 and at the end of the year a conversion was announced. The target machine is the VBXE 2-equipped Atari 8-bit so it'll be just as colourful and fast-moving as the original.



» [C64] Ninjas need a country club?

>> Martial arts overload

Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit legend Alf Yngve who produced *The Last Amazon* and *Archetype* for Psytronik has returned to his roots and been working on a new game with Jon Wells' modified horizontal version of SEUCK. *1,000 Kung-Fu Maniacs* is its name; the game itself is something of a parody of martial arts games. Someone has uploaded a video that we've hidden behind **http://kikstart.eu/1000-maniacs**



» [C16] Still avoiding severed heads.

>> Cash and grab

The rotund money grabber *Uwol*, whose *Quest For Money* we've already looked at on the Spectrum, Mega Drive and C64 has recently cropped up on the Commodore 16 as well – developed by *Adventures In Time* programmer Róbert Kisnémeth, the plot remains a matter of collecting coins and dodging security drones that we've come to know and perhaps even love. **http://kikstart.eu/uwol-c16**

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

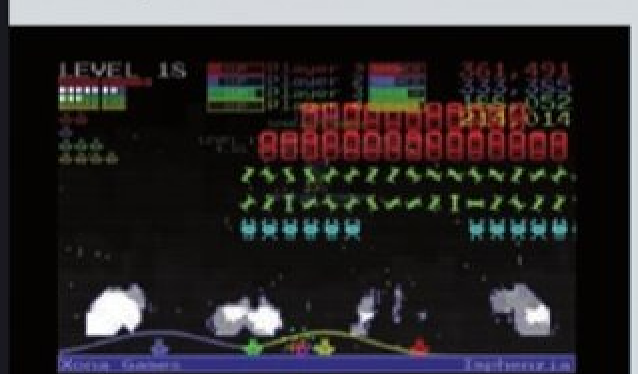
WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



>> Power to the people

Although it isn't fully operational at the time of writing, one exciting project that should hopefully be open to the public soon is IndieCity; the blog talks about it being a download portal "for ALL indie gamers" and does a little soul searching to decide what that actually constitutes – for those who are unsure, if you read this section of **Retro Gamer** anywhere near regularly you're an indie gamer. **http://www.indiecity.com/** is the address.



>> More Decimation

Over at Xbox Live Indie Games, Xona Games' *Decimation X3* has been released as part of the Indie Games Winter Uprising. The XBLIG sequel to the hugely popular *Decimation X* is still an intense, fast-paced *Space Invaders* variant for up to four simultaneous players but now there are formations and bosses in there that need to be blown to smithereens. **http://kikstart.eu/x3** leads to where it can be purchased **for 80 Points.**

FLASH BOREDOM



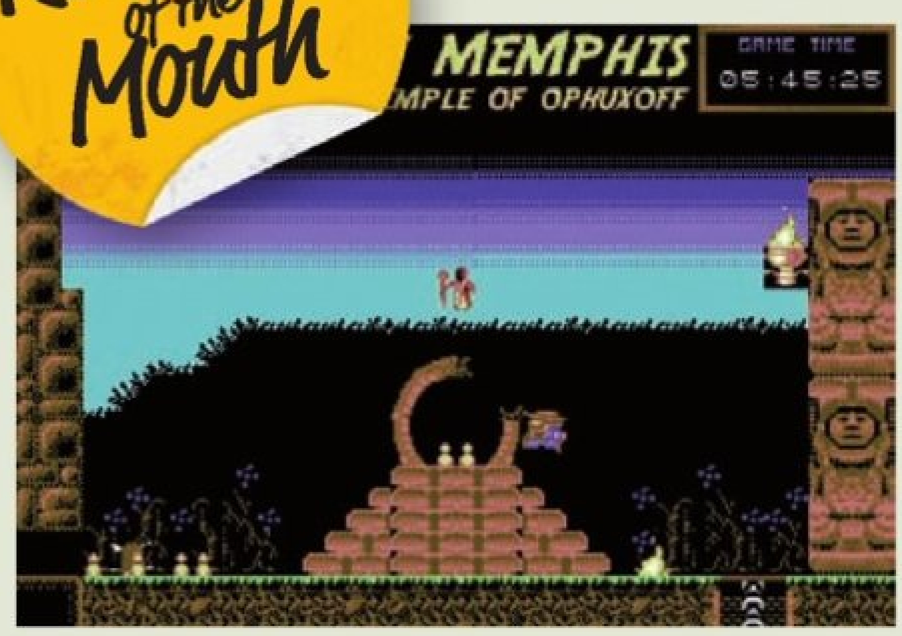
Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Kagnyan.**

IT MIGHT LOOK like another Space Invaders variant and involve shooting, but Kagnyan is more a fast and furious, action-based match-three style puzzler. Shooting will change the polarity of a column of enemies while getting horizontal lines of matching shapes will remove them and defend the ground bases. **http://kikstart.eu/kagnyan**

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING...



Remake of the Mouth



ROCKY MEMPHIS AND THE TEMPLE OF OPHUXOFF

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/MEMPHIS



Despite the nod in the title and a passing physical resemblance to one Rick Dangerous, titular exploring hero Rocky Memphis's outing more resembles 8-bit platform exploration games such as *Jet Set Willy* or *Gordian Tomb*. The controls are simple and Rocky walks, jumps and climbs around the rooms of the temple while simultaneously avoiding moving enemies and collecting glowing treasure items.

The rooms themselves are all rendered in the C64's 16-colour palette and a lot of thought has gone into the graphics and layouts; neat touches include a couple of Stargates – one of which is broken – and locations that are shrines to some of the games that inspired Rocky Memphis such as *Joe Gunn*.

Rocky is immortal, but dying will lose him some time and the goal of the game is to completely ransack the tomb as quickly as possible, a tall order since it's pyramid-shaped and has a staggering 600 chambers which in turn contain an almost heart-stopping 4,000 treasures to collect. Working through that lot in one sitting would have been overwhelming, so the developers have thankfully included a self-updating map, teleporters to get around a little quicker and a save option that means players can enjoy a dip into the *Temple Of Ophuxoff* at their leisure while still standing a chance of a good online score placement.



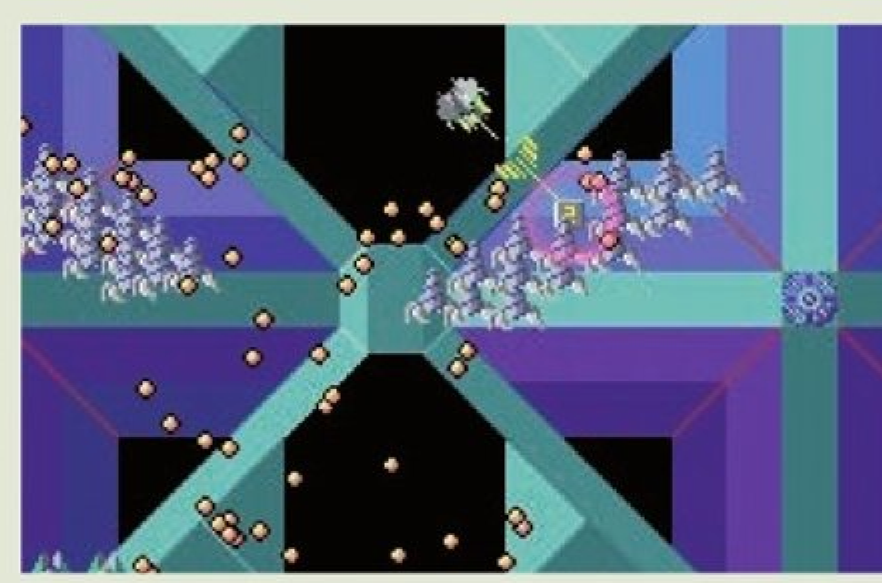
SPACE POLICE ON SUPERHIGHWAY 9

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SPACE-POLICE



The Space Police need YOU! The SuperHighways of the future are busy thoroughfares and criminals are everywhere, harassing and laying mines in the path of innocent road users, smashing into them drunkenly and ignoring the SuperHighway code. The best way to deal with this menace is to wade in and knock the stuffing out of the perp's vehicle.

There are two police vehicles to use: the nimble Law Mower and more sluggish Police Tank, and an eye must be kept on your health because knocking into innocent drivers will reduce it. It might be simple, but boosting while smashing baddies is amusing for 80 Points.



NOVA 2010

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/NOVA2010



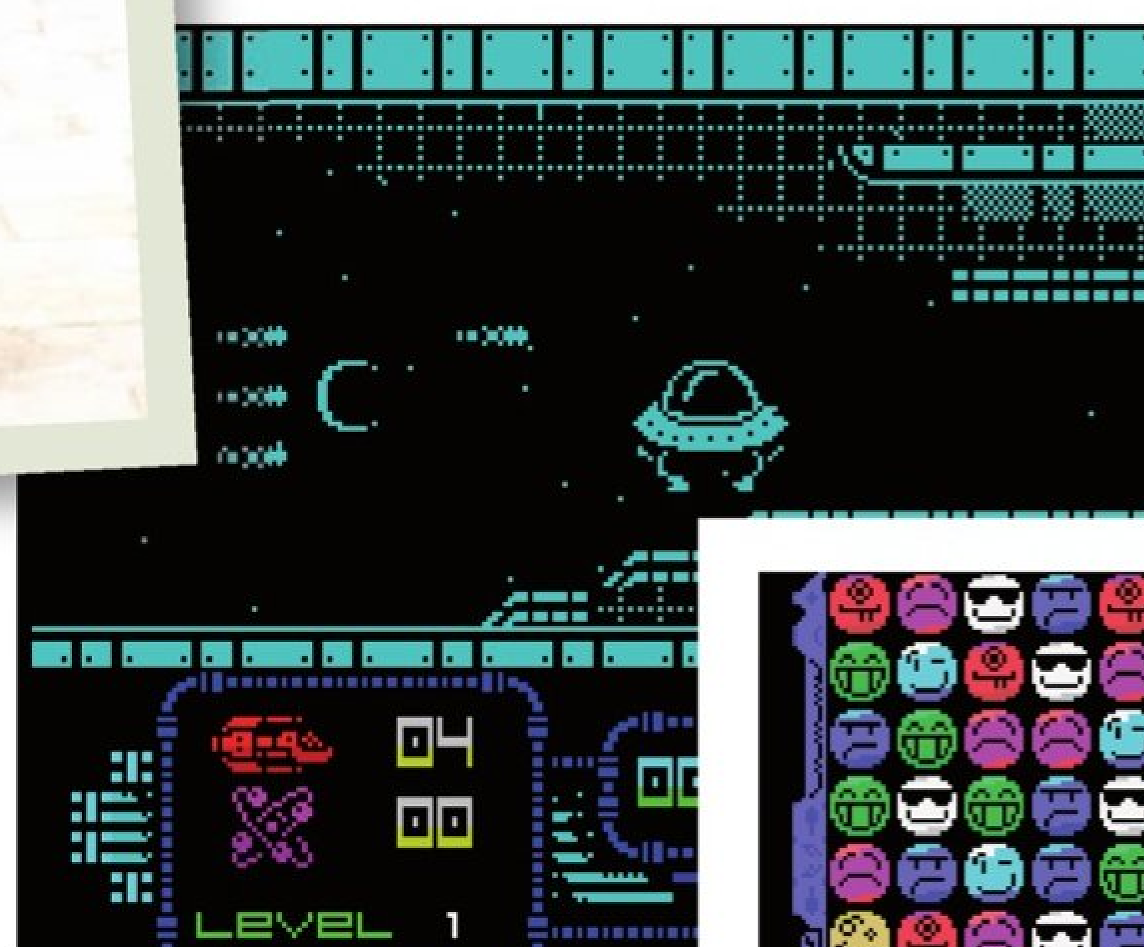
***Nova 2010* is** a remake of the coin-operated arena shooter *Nova 2001*. There isn't a lot of depth to either title and the primary directives are to shoot enemies to get tokens, collect said tokens to gain more score and, once the area is clear, move on to the next – the only variation being one particular enemy that, if it should manage to travel the width of the play area, will summon a boss into the fray.

This is a pretty much direct copy of the original and is surprisingly addictive, with games sometimes lasting upwards of ten minutes. The PC has a staggering number of arena shooters, but *Nova 2010* is a more sedate example of the genre that proves almost relaxing to play.

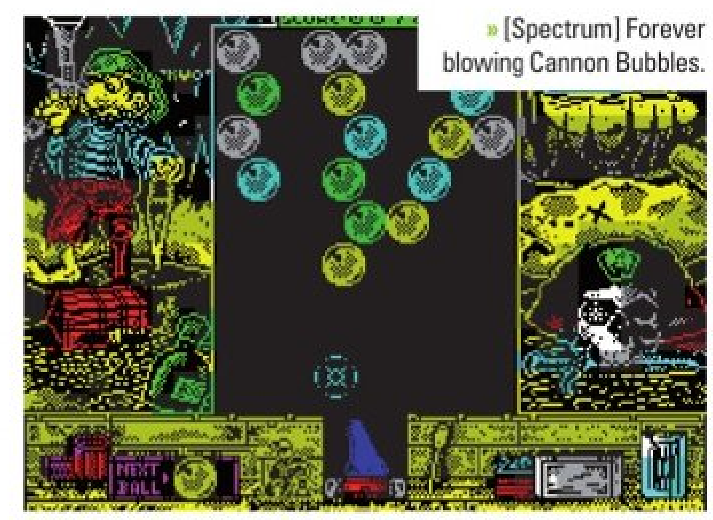


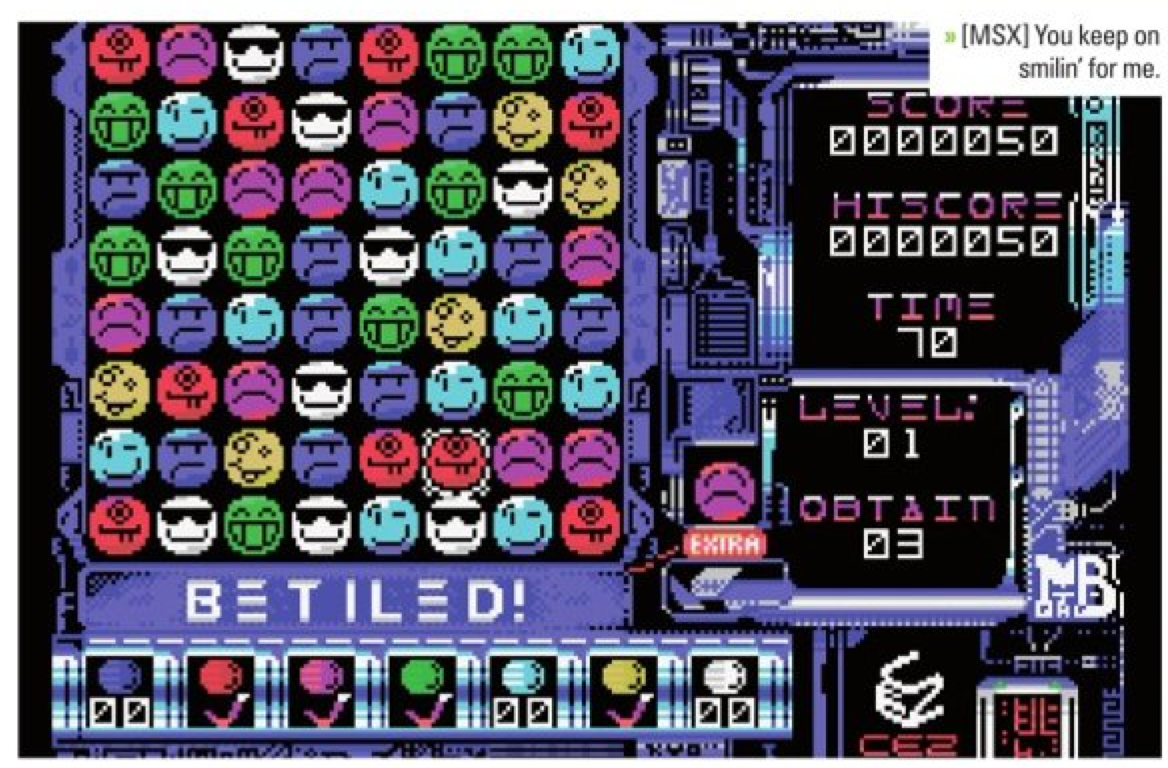
HOMEBREW HEROES

FRANCISCO JAVIER PEÑA DEVELOPS SPECTRUM GAMES UNDER THE PSEUDONYM UTOPIAN AND HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH SEVERAL SPECTRUM AND MSX TITLES OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, INCLUDING CANNON BUBBLE, BETILED! AND GENESIS: DAWN OF A NEW DAY - WE FOUND OURSELVES WONDERING WHAT MAKES HIM TICK



» [Spectrum] Blam blam, kaboom!


» [Spectrum] Forever blowing Cannon Bubbles.



» [MSX] You keep on smilin' for me.

Q&A

Retro Gamer: So what got you involved with developing for the Spectrum?
Francisco Javier Peña: I had wanted to develop games for the Spectrum for a very long time, actually since I was a child and had my good old +2A. I never learnt enough to do it then, and just tried to create a text adventure using PAW, but never finished it. Many years later in 2005 I decided it was about time to give it a try again now that I knew more about programming. I discovered z88dk and the splib2 sprite library (God bless Alvin Albrecht for creating it). I started playing with it, joined CEZ GS and finally created *Cannon Bubble*, my first game. Since then I have learnt more about the z80 assembly and some other 8-bit computers, especially the MSX.

RG: And who would you say are your programming heroes?
FJP: In no particular order:

Jonathan "Joffa" Smith, who could do magic with the humble Spectrum.

John Ritman, a real genius when it comes to creating good games.

Paco Menéndez, who just published three games, but was able to push the envelope with every new game.

John Carmack… not exactly retro, but another real master.

RG: You've already covered a lot of gaming genres, can you tell us what future plans you have?
FJP: My most immediate plan is to port *Genesis* to some other platforms. I have already started, but considering my long development times I cannot commit to any release date.

Beyond that, I am not really sure. I would like to spend some time experimenting with other genres, such as platformers, and also learn about another 8-bit computer and create a game for it. The Sam Coupè is probably the most appealing platform to me, coming from the Spectrum.

RG: Scrolling shooters are very rare in the Spectrum homebrew scene; did that motivate you to write *Genesis*?
FJP: There were quite a few motivations behind *Genesis*. Initially, I just wanted to create a side-scrolling engine. When I had it ready, my first idea was to create an even more complex game, in the lines of *Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* but with some differences. But I thought it would be too ambitious, so instead I tried to go for another genre.

Then I remembered how terribly bad I am at scrolling shooters (never completed *R-Type* level 1 without cheats), and thought it could be a good challenge to create a shoot-'em-up game I could actually play for a couple of levels. So *Genesis* was born.

HIGH FIVE

The homebrew games that Francisco can't live without

1. **Malaika, Prehistorik Quest (MSX)** A cute *Mario*-like game, with a super-smooth scroll.
2. **Hydorah (PC)** A very detailed shoot'em-up for PC, with a genuine old taste.
3. **Sir Ababol (Spectrum)** For me, the best game from The Mojon Twins.
4. **Invasion Of The Zombie Monsters (Spectrum, MSX)** Excellent arcade, a taste of *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* with lots of colourful graphics.
5. **Perfect Fit (MSX)** A simple puzzle game, but it somehow got me addicted for a long time.

RG: Of the games you've worked on to date, which would be the game you're most proud of and why?
FJP: Definitely, *Genesis: Dawn Of A New Day*. I have spent a very long time with it, and learned a lot while creating that game. It is much more complex than the puzzle-based games I did before, and while playing it I cannot help feeling that it is as polished as I can get it today.

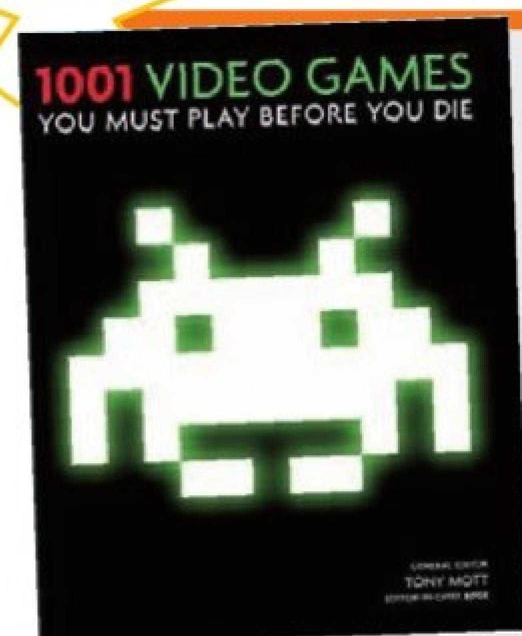
RG: And finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?
FJP: Start small. Try to do a simple game that you know you can finish in a reasonable timeframe, then increase the complexity for future games.

And then, while you are doing your complex game and everything is not as funny as you thought it would be, remember how well it felt when you finished your earlier game. It will give you enough motivation to get through.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER



THE BEST RETRO GAMER GAMES OF ALL TIME

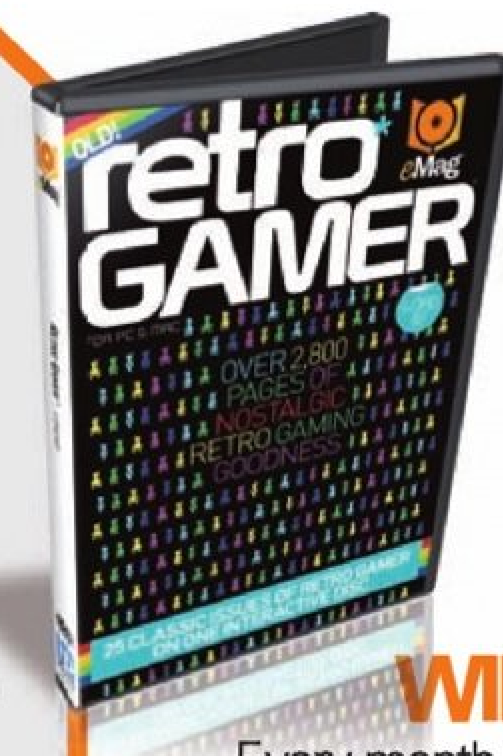
Dear Retro Gamer,

After stuffing myself silly with Christmas turkey watching numerous 'best of' shows and reading the rather good *1001 Video Games You Must Play Before You Die*, I began to have a little think.

Why doesn't **Retro Gamer** do its own best of list? As much as I enjoyed *1001 Video Games*, there were quite a few inaccuracies and too many similar games – do we really need to play eight *Grand Theft Auto* games? I'd happily buy a **Retro Gamer** version and wouldn't even mind if you filled an entire issue of the magazine with your best videogame choices. As much as I have enjoyed reading through *1001*, I'd love a **Retro Gamer** equivalent to accompany it. Please make it happen.

Yours hopefully,
David James

Good to hear that you're enjoying *1001 Video Games*. Darran also received it for Christmas and was happy to see a well-deserved entry for *Strider* in there. We certainly like your idea of an accompanying book and will definitely consider something for the future. Have an eMag for being on the same wavelength as us.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

ISOMETRIC MEMORIES

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to write in and say that I really enjoyed the feature on Rare that was in the last issue. I was particularly pleased to see some coverage of *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll* as well, which is one of my all-time favourite games. A few years ago I treated myself to the Mega Drive version and finally completed it for the first time, some 12 or so years after first attempting it on the NES! Although I had to rely on an autofire joypad to defeat the final Bigfoot boss, what made it really great was discovering that the Mega Drive version had an extra final level that isn't in the NES version. It's just a shame the fantastic NES soundtrack didn't make the conversion unscathed!

It also got me thinking about some of the other isometric games I've enjoyed over the years: *Solstice*, *The Immortal*, *Populous*, *Dark Savior*, Rare's own *Marble Madness*, even *Sonic 3D: Flicky's Island*. I know it's not exactly a genre in itself, but isometric games are so few and far between I wondered if you would be able to run a feature on them in a future issue?

Thanks, as ever, for the great magazine.
Tim Fitches

In a stroke of coincidence that you'd normally only ever find in *Viz*, you'll have no doubt noticed that this is an isometric-themed issue. While not all the games you have mentioned appear in our feature, we're hoping that there will be plenty that you find to your liking. Enjoy.

IT'S MISTER BEEP

Hello and greetings,

First of all, I'd like to thank you for your kind words in your article about the recently released ZX Spectrum game *Horace In The Mystic Woods*.



» **[NES] Rare took the name 'Bigfoot' a little too literally when it made *Snake Rattle 'N' Roll*, we think.**

However, I would like to give you the following info. My actual nickname is Mister Beep. Dr Beep is a completely different person, who doesn't actually make music. I hope that clears things up.

Best wishes,
Mister Beep

Apologies for that, Mister Beep. We won't make the same mistake in the future. If anyone wants to listen to Mister Beep's 8-bit tunes, head on over to his website at mister_beep.republika.pl.

R3PLAY LOVE

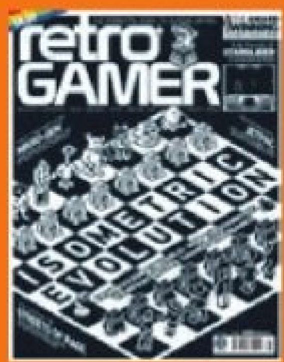
Hi Darran,

You can't imagine how thrilled I was to open up my very favourite magazine since *Zzap!64*, only to see a picture of myself playing against Archer MacLean at *IK+*! Not only did I have a piccy but I got mentioned in the narrative too! Excellent stuff and I thank you, not only for that but also for the great review of R3play, a stunning Oli Frey cover and another awesome edition, which had more Amiga content than I can remember ever seeing in **Retro Gamer**! Well done!

Now onto a cheeky request…

I don't know what you guys use to page set the magazine, but I was wondering if it would be possible to send me a PDF of the R3play review so that I can print them out and frame them, rather than wreck my precious issue of **Retro Gamer**. I was planning on printing them out on landscape A4 – so, yes, shrunk – and sticking the article in an A2 frame along with my R3play magazine, my exhibitor's badge and my signed *IK+* T-shirt that Archer signed after the competition. It's total nostalgia but what the heck.

As for R3play itself, what a success! Yeah, I won a competition and got into



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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



YOUTUBE UPDATE

DUE TO ALL the festivities it's been a rather quiet month on YouTube. Darran did manage to put up a video of the classic board game *Lost Valley Of The Dinosaur*, though, and then spent all the holiday forcing his kids to play it. Check it out at the usual address.

www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz

the semis of the *Sensible Soccer* one too, but meeting up face to face with the other members of Amibay and meeting some others, including Antiriad from the forum, who shared a couple of beers with me while we waited on our train back to Scotland, was just the best experience! I also had lots of interest in my Minimig that I exhibited, which was great fun!

Anyway, thanks again and I hope to see you there next year.

Thanks very much,

John

MORE R3PLAY LOVE

Dear Retro Gamer,

Firstly, and I know you always get this, but it has to be said, congrats on a fantastic magazine. I have a subscription and it is the best time of the month when my blue envelope is on my doormat!

Anyway, back to the reason why I'm writing to you. I just wanted to congratulate everyone who had some involvement with the wonderful R3play event. I managed to have a weekend pass, and living in Blackpool made it even more special.

Getting through the doors on the first day and seeing all the new and old systems getting played was overwhelming. I managed to try almost every arcade game that was there – but not *Dance Dance Revolution*, as I don't think I can bust a move like that any more – and I entered myself in every tournament as well, although my only luck was to play in the *Warlord* tourney and get to the semifinal. I would have liked to talk with a lot of the people who were there, but I didn't really know anyone – except Akuma and Chun-Li, of course.



» R3play was an utterly fantastic event and we aim to have an even bigger presence next year.

Still, I just wanted to sign off with a HUGE thank you for letting me know about the event, and I was hoping that you could give me some good news and tell me that R3play will be returning next year.

Thanks and keep up the good work.

Andy Whiteman

We're really glad to hear that both you and Andy enjoyed R3play, John. It was an excellent weekend with a truly astonishing range of wonderful games to play. We're always impressed by the sheer amount of work that people like Gordon and Dave put into these events, and we look forward to collaborating with them again next year. Oh and Andy: next year just pop on over to people and talk to them, mate. Everyone who attends these events is incredibly friendly and are always looking for new retro friends, so be sure to make some new ones in 2011.

> "I wanted to congratulate everyone involved with the wonderful R3play event"

RETRODATE PROFILE



Name:	Andrew Joseph
Joined:	11 September 2009
Location:	Southend, Essex
Occupation:	Theatre Technician
Website:	www.yolkfolk.com
Fave Games Systems:	Spectrum



» Imagine how excited John is going to be when he sees that we've printed his picture with Archer Maclean yet again.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 170,560



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: PAC-MANIA

Why I picked it: To tie in with this month's isometric love fest and because I did a recent YouTube video. **Handy tip:** Start on Round 4 for a big bonus. Aren't I a little cheat!



High Score: 65,850



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: METRO-CROSS

Why I picked it: You can't move for fitness games now, and while this might not help you shed the pounds, it's tremendous fun. **Handy tip:** The best advice I can give is to simply practice. Learning the tracks is the best method.



High Score: 1,008,060



MARTYN

CHOSEN GAME: RAMBO III

Why I picked it: The film plays on UK television all the time, so I thought I'd fire up Taito's arcade game. **Handy tip:** Take out the enemy troops before concentrating on the vehicles. Save your bombs for the end-of-level battle.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite isometric game?

Bub&Bob *Molecule Man* on the C64. Yes, it's crap, but I don't care!

IronMaidenRule *Crusader: No Remorse* on the PSone. Fantastic isometric sci-fi shooter!

ipmarks *Knight Lore*. That game just amazed me. I'd never seen anything like it before. *Ant Attack* had already impressed me, but the graphics of *Knight Lore* were something else. Just the way you could move tables around was brilliant – I was easily impressed in the Eighties. Still a superb game today and one of the few Spectrum games I ever finished without cheating.

necronom That's a really difficult question. It's either *UFO: Enemy Unknown*, *Breach 2* or *Head Over Heels*.

jdanddiet *The Great Escape*. Atmosphere you can spoon with a shovel.

r0jaws Definitely *Fairlight* on the Speccy. I just couldn't get enough of that 3D world; to me it was like being there. It was so atmospheric, and all the objects handled realistically. I still play it today, and get just as far as I always used to. But I still love it.

Servbot *Sonic 3D* on the Mega Drive. Not the best *Sonic* game, but the visuals kept me playing.

pantal00ns *Quazatron*. Just a fun game, if a little hard for a crap gamer like myself.

Second best: *The Great Escape*. Brilliantly executed – pun intended – you could almost be Steve McQueen for a day. Although playing it with a baseball glove proved a little awkward.

kelp7 *Wizardry* by The Edge on the C64 was fiendishly difficult, massively atmospheric, and each enemy had its own piece of music, which made it terrifying when you entered certain rooms and you knew what you would be up against before you saw it then frantically tried to choose the right spell.

Otherwise my vote goes to *Panther*, also on the C64, which was an incredible game considering it was a budget title with a classic soundtrack.

the_hawk *Pac-Mania*. When you were backed into a corner, it was nice to be able to get out of a jam by jumping over the ghosts' heads.

I always found isometric games too fiddly, though. Give me 2D every time!

snigfarp It's got to be *Fairlight* for me. 3D rooms that weren't laid out on an obvious square grid gave it a bit more realism than the other isometric games out there at the time.

paranoid marvin *The Adventures Of Robin Hood* on the Amiga. Rob the rich and give to the poor, recapture your castle and get the girl; or shoot everyone and keep the cash for yourself – it's entirely up to you! A great sandbox game with so much to see and do.

Alyxx *Fallout 2* for me. The depth of the world created, the amount of things you can do, and how customisable everything is makes for a game that I keep coming back to even now in 2011. It has some of the most replay value I've felt in any game. It surely improved immensely on the original.

lavalyte I was going to say *Viewpoint* to be clever, but really it's the Bitmap Bros' *Cadaver*. *Viewpoint* was a fling; *Cadaver* was my university girlfriend.

chewy *Enduro Racer* on the Master System. Got this and my copy of *Hang-On* for the same birthday. Apparently, totally pants compared to the arcade, but as I have never played it I don't mind! I loved it as a kid. Motorbikes were my thing and this got more play than *Hang-On* due to the fact that I could finish it! Trying to beat my quickest times became an obsession.

SexyWayne *Gunfright* on the MSX. One of the first games I owned for the system and holds many fond memories.

Walrus I used to play *Zombie Zombie* for hours. Trap the zombies in a box and then just take my time rebuilding the city. You couldn't save it at the end, though, so that hard work would be inevitably lost. If only we'd had emulators back in those days.

DCharlie *Knightlore*. I have a lot of memories of this game. Our town had a fair number of arcades but we were badly serviced for games stores in '84. The one store we had of note was simply a guy operating out of his living room. The owner would always have the latest game playing on a small portable TV. On this particular day my dad and I swung the door open and there it was: *Knightlore*. It was like a game from the future and the impact was stunning. While isometric games had come before, *Knightlore* really spawned a rush of isometric games, especially on the Spectrum.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

RIDGE RACER

nakamura I am a huge fan of the series, have been since first playing it in the arcade in 1993. While it didn't offer the brilliant multiplayer and racing excitement of *Daytona*, it offered a brilliant driving experience that has evolved into a perfect arcade racer.

Will2097 I love the *Ridge Racer* series. I still think the first one is the best; it does still have a feel of theatre about it. *Revolution* has been en vogue, I noticed, since the *Edge* magazine re-review, but I always liked *Rage Racer* a lot.

Casio kid *Ridge Racer 4* is still a fantastic game: I remember being blown away by both the quality of the graphics and the overall aesthetic. I played through it again a couple of weeks back, and it's still very, very solid.

XBLA IN 2010

Halcyon Daze00 Over the past 12 months XBLA has again proven to be an absolute treasure trove for retro gamers. So many good games, some superb updates and remakes, loads of new games but with a retro feel… XBLA keeps on providing quality retro content.

sscott I have spent an awful lot of money on Microsoft Points, but it's been worth it! *Pac-Man CE DX*, *Hydro Thunder Hurricane* and *Serious Sam HD* have been highlights for me.

thevulture The more I think about it, *Shadow Complex* was one of THE games for myself in 2010. Just bloody brilliant. I'm in credit with MS Points after using a pre-paid card for the *Alan Wake* DLC. Currently umming and ahhhing over what to buy next.

Slacey 1070 Picked up *Perfect Dark HD* for 400 Points. Had a quick play and it looks good and like something I'll spend some time on, if I can get the rest of the family away from the TV for five minutes.

GBA NES CLASSICS

Riddler Has anyone played these titles and rate them? I want to pick them up and wondered if they are good ports of the NES versions. I always wanted portable NES games and can't be bothered modding my PSP.

dste Funnily enough I completed the first *Legend Of Zelda* a couple of days ago and really liked it. I personally find no problems at all with the port and found it quite easy to play on my DS.

GigaPepsiMan All of the *NES Classics* ports are pretty spot-on, though I would skip *Metroid* because it is an unlockable bonus in *Metroid: Zero Mission*.

Lorfarius They are spot-on ports but woefully overpriced. They were on release!

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Donkey Kong Country is the best?

Donkey Kong Country [SNES]



Donkey Kong Country Returns [Wii]



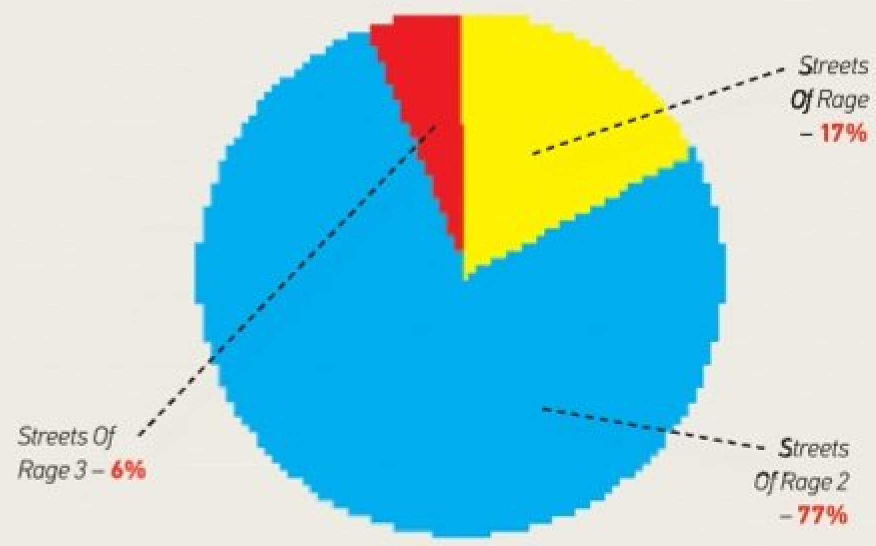
50% | 50%

Miketendo Retro Studios did a great job, but you just cannot beat the original.

ShadowMan *DKC Returns* gets my vote. It plays better, it's more fun and I prefer the level design.

HOT TOPIC

Best Streets Of Rage Game



"It's like the *Aliens* films: the first is amazing, the third is a bit of a turd, but the second is the perfect balance."
– Sepp Salerno

"It's never going to be anything other than *Streets Of Rage 2*, is it? I love it so much that I even bought a complete Japanese copy."
– Megamixer

OKAY THEN…

Dear Retro Gamer,

I had a nightmare the other night. I was at a manager's conference on developing new buzz words, when the head manager strode up to the platform and started his spiel.

"I am here today to loop back the information I promised. Touching base with you all about this offline shows how committed to leveraging the idea showers I am. It is very encouraging that in going forward this will continue to keep us managers ahead our minions, and what we need to do now is incentivise our workforce. Just as I have all of you under my radar, that's what you now need to do with the people in your department. So as we come to the close of play, remember to grab the low-hanging fruit and be a product evangelist. This will keep us focused on the blue sky initiatives."

As you can imagine, I woke up in a cold sweat. Phew! Only a dream. The next day the postie dropped off the latest issue of **Retro Gamer** – brilliant, excellent reading but then SHOCK… the article 'Spectrum games get touch feely'. Steve Wilcox's "data evidencing". Aargh – what's that? I am telling myself to keep calm. It's okay, breathe, okay, keep reading… aaaggghhh "regularise the market" gibber… All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy…

May all your days be buzz-free.

Gregor Houghton aka Jack

We've now read through this letter several times and we think that Gregor really likes the magazine. We think…

> "I opened the door and there it was: Knightlore. It was like a game from the future and the impact was stunning"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The 3DS

Darran and Steven have been insanely jealous this month because Stuart was able to jet off to Amsterdam to play on Nintendo's incoming 3D handheld. The gutted pair consoled themselves by playing on a Virtual Boy, but it just wasn't the same…



» [Arcade] *MIA: Missing In Action* is now available in Game Room.

NAME THAT GAME

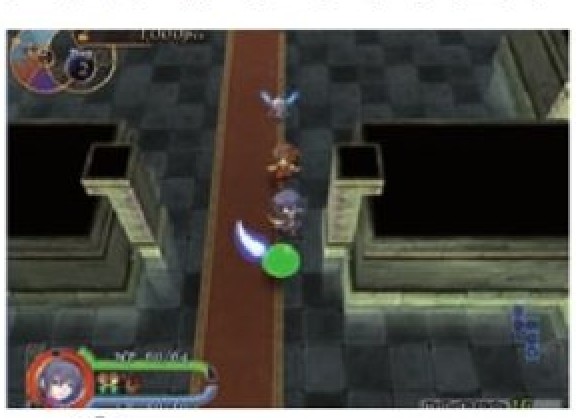
Dear Retro Gamer,

Please can you help me with a gaming predicament I recently found myself in? When I was a wee nipper I used to hang out at my local arcade and play all sorts of classic games. I've got particular memories of one game, but can't for the life of me remember what it was called. All I can remember is that you controlled a soldier and ran through a forest, shooting people. You could pick up a variety of different weapons and it played a little bit like Konami's *Green Beret*. The first level was set in the jungle, but I can't really remember much else. Any advice you could give me would be greatly appreciated.

Mark Elkins

Hi there, Mark. We're pretty sure that the game you're referring to is *MIA: Missing In Action*, which was released in 1989. The reason why it reminds you of Konami's *Green Beret* is because it's actually a sequel in all but name. Best of all, it's currently available on Xbox Live's Game Room, so if you have a spare 240 Points you can check it out and relive some precious memories. Enjoy.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Recettear: An Item Shop's Tale

I've become obsessed with this charming little item management game. While it starts off simply, it soon reveals amazing depth, meaning that I've barely dented the surface after ten hours of play.

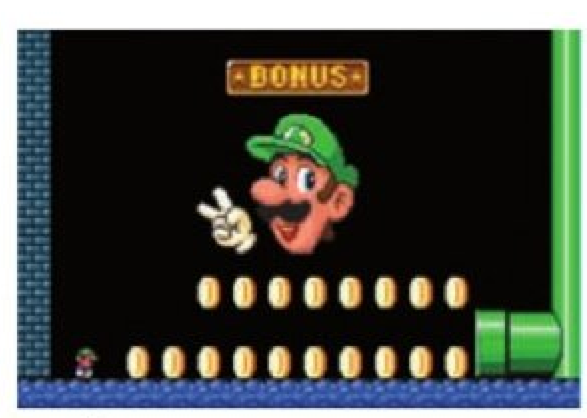




STUART

Sonic Colours (DS)

Like its Wii counterpart, this is another superb offering that harks back to the evergreen hills of the Mega Drive. It's incredibly quick, and the level design is fun and inventive. It's a bit on the short side, though.





MARTYN

Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels

This platformer is as tough as old builders' boots, which is why I feel compelled to conquer it. I've also read that there are some bonkers bonus worlds to unlock when you beat the main game.

retro GAMER

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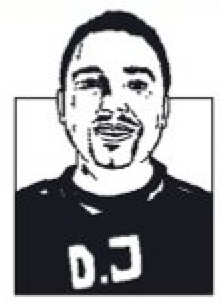
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Stix

TAITO'S QIX IN ALL BUT NAME

» RETROREVIVAL

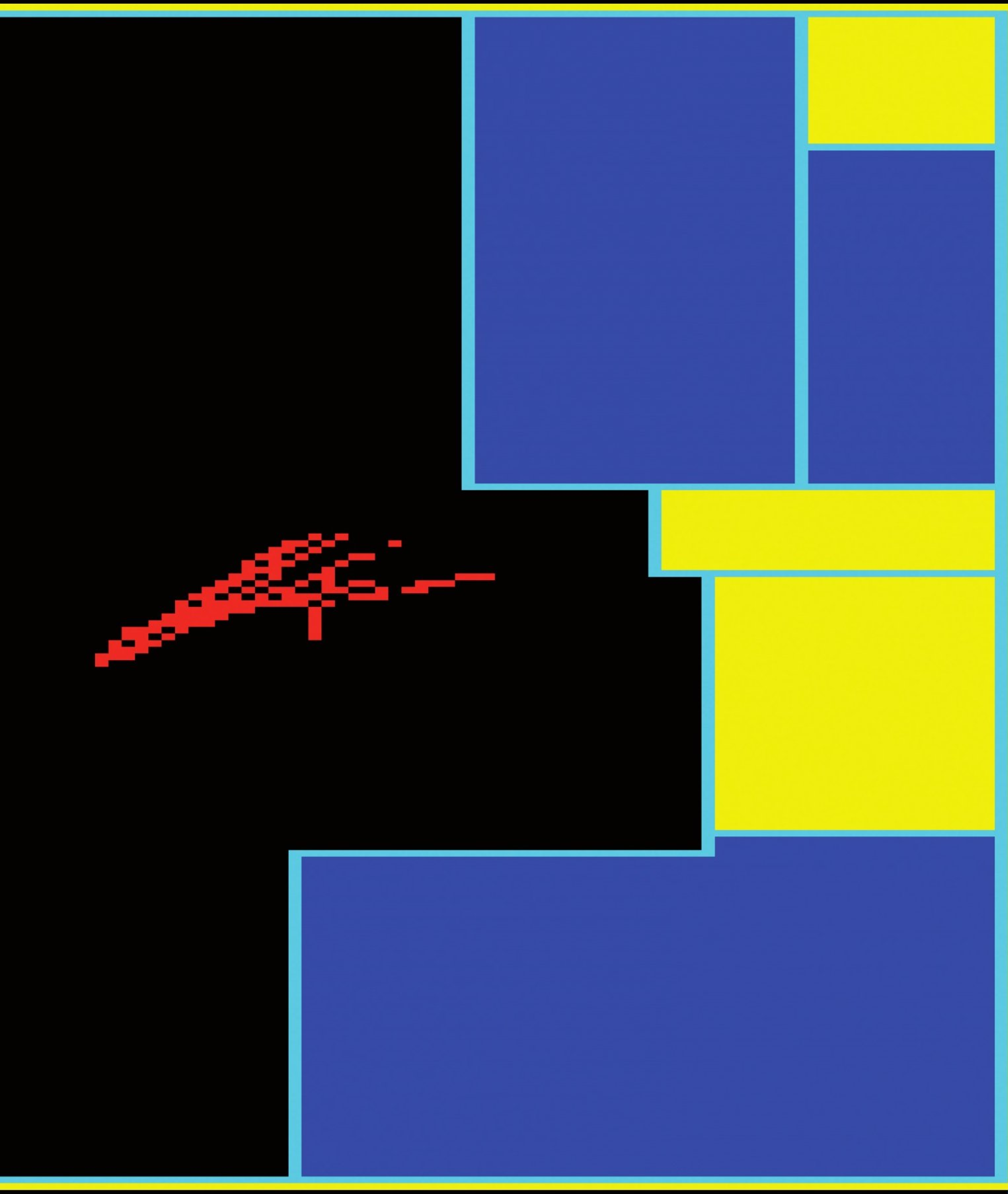


» BBC MICRO
» ANDREW TROTT
» 1984

One of the great things about this job is the discovery of the unknown wonders that even a cursory browse of the internet can uncover. Realising that we hadn't featured any standalone BBC Micro games in the magazine for a while, I began trawling various websites and forums in the hope of finding something interesting to read about. A few enquiries later and I was pointed to *Stix*, and it turns out it's a surprisingly decent clone of Taito's *Qix*.

In fact, it's a really, really good clone, and aside from a slight drop in speed compared to the arcade original, it's an otherwise slick piece of coding. There's no front end, no screen with instructions; you're straight into the action, which is just as compelling as it was in the arcade original. Each screen features a box with a roving Stix in it, which must be contained by creating boxes. Drawing slow lines puts you in more danger – you'll die if the Stix hits the line you're drawing – but offers you 20 points if you manage to finish drawing it, while a faster line is easier to complete but will net you only two points. Matters are further complicated by the quark and anti-quark: two constantly moving cursors that move in opposite directions around the outside of the screen. If they come into contact with your own cursor, another life will be lost. Once you've filled in at least 75 per cent of the screen, you'll move on to the next stage. It's a fantastic concept for a game and, as a result, it was licensed to a number of different home computers and consoles.

Interestingly, the BBC Micro never received its own official version of *Qix*, so it's perhaps unsurprising that Andrew Trott saw a hole in the market and plugged it so successfully. The BBC continually gets an unfair rep when it comes to gaming due to its educational roots, but it's a system with a wealth of great games on it and some truly fantastic clones, filling the gaps in the library where official support neglected it. Here's hoping that another delve into the great unknown of BBC gaming brings up another similar gem in the coming months. *

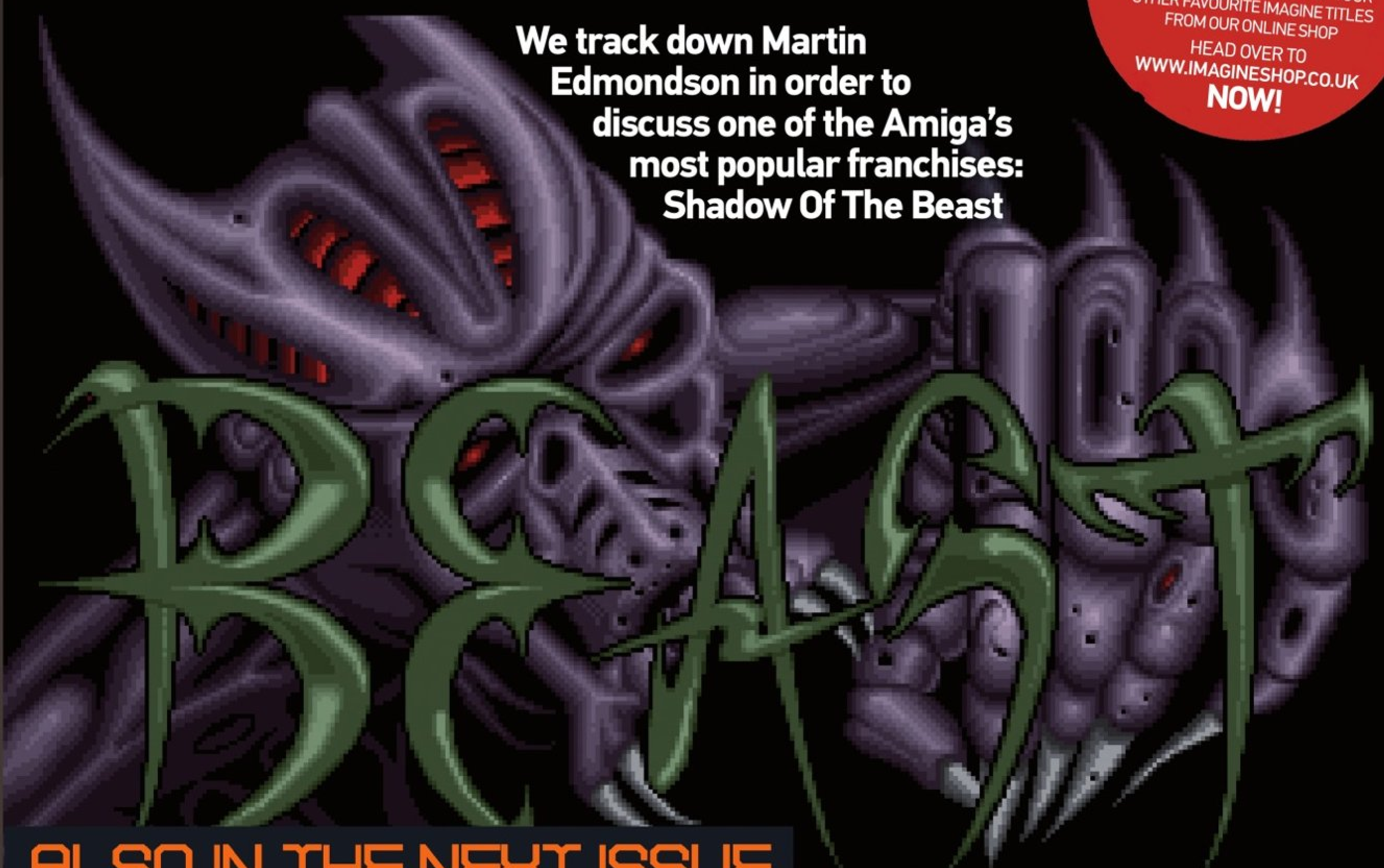


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It's a beast of an interview!



We track down Martin Edmondson in order to discuss one of the Amiga's most popular franchises: Shadow Of The Beast

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Nintendo 64

■ In a brand new article, we highlight the most desirable games and items to collect for Nintendo's 64-bit console



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■ Co-creator Scott Miller looks back at the history of the Duke and explains why his latest game has taken forever



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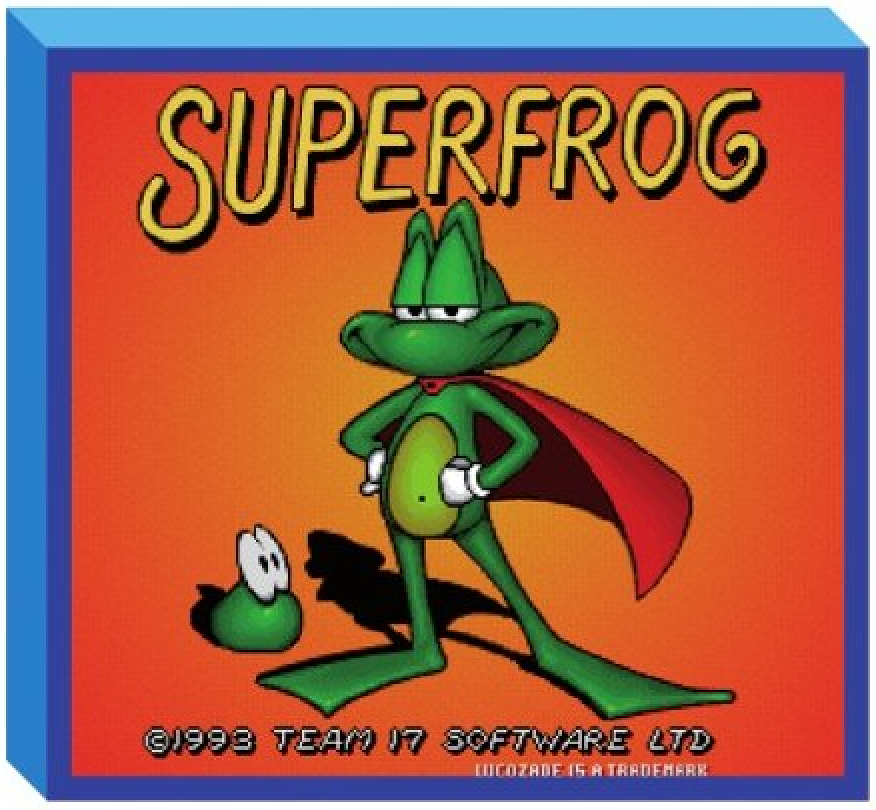

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ENDGAME



SUPERFROG

» Ask 60 Amiga owners to name the best platform game to star a drink-endorsing frog and we'd bet that all of them would answer Superfrog. The tale of the Frog Prince has seen many different variations and endings over the years, but none are more bizarre than Team17's interpretation…



01

» Coming face to face with the dastardly witch, Superfrog has one final battle to win if he is to save his bride-to-be. Good thing the witch was oblivious to the effects of Lucozade on frogs. That'll learn the green-skinned harridan.



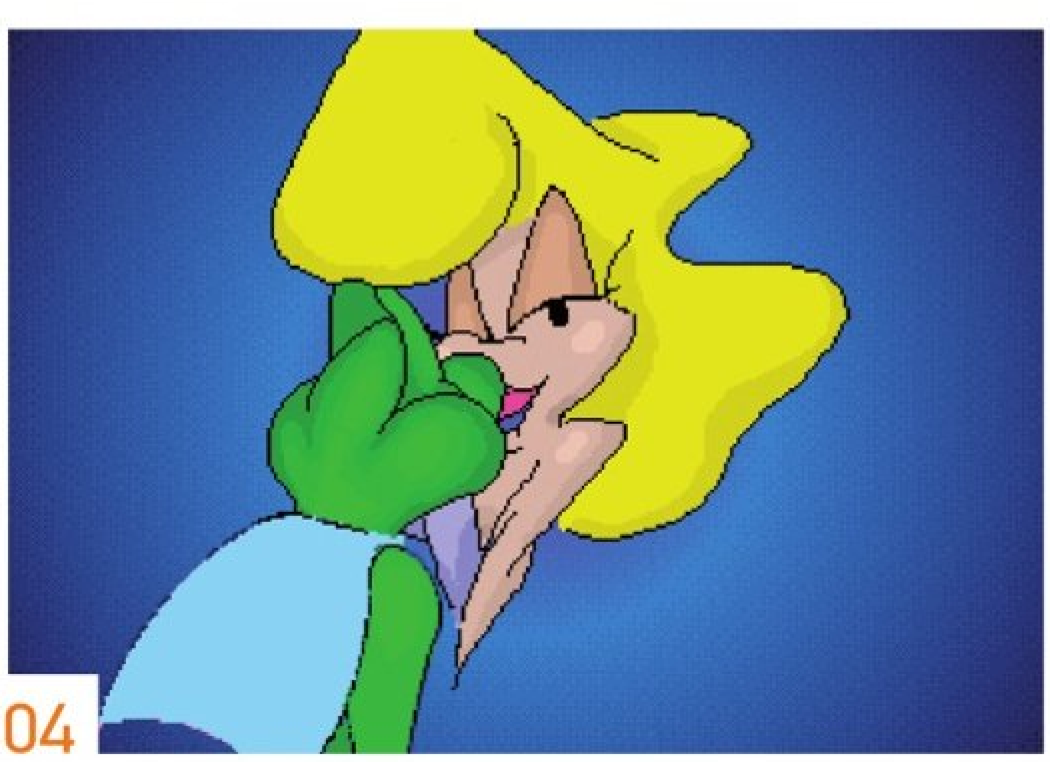
02

» With the witch defeated, the princess is saved. She responds by seductively winking while also thrusting her subtle chest at the camera. Clearly heroics, charisma and witch-beating counts for a lot in the eyes of a fair maiden.



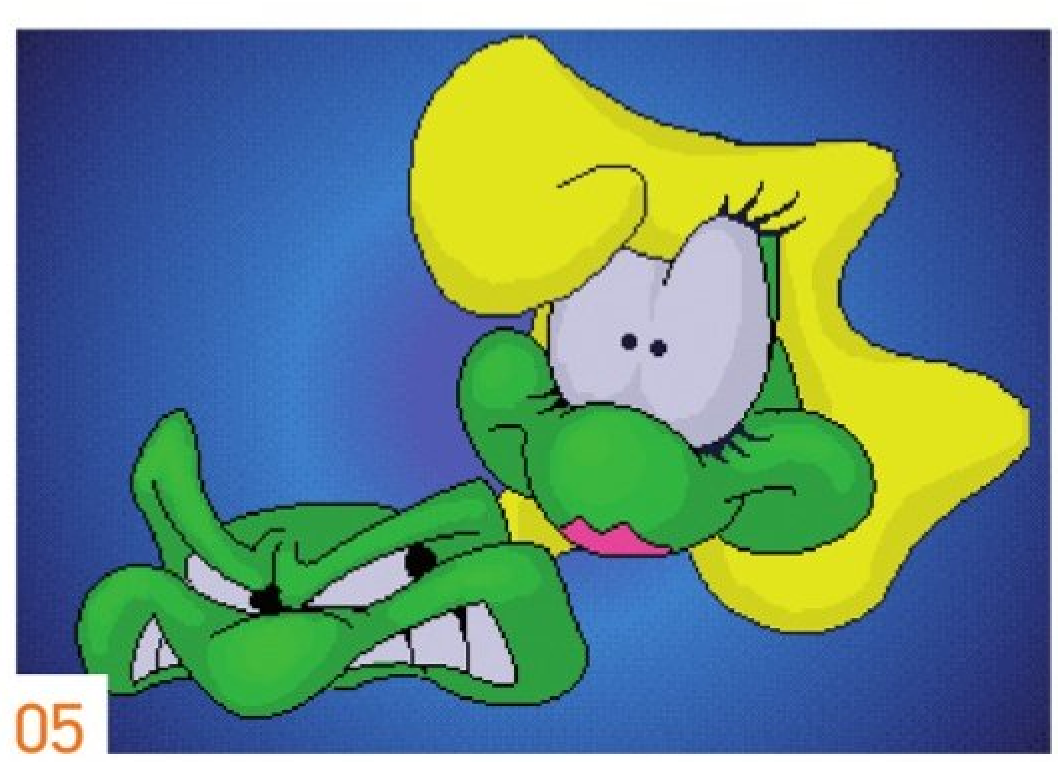
03

» The frog's luck is in. Giving a wry smile to camera, he reads the signs and decides to take his chance. This is starting to feel like some kind of bizarre deodorant advert – the kind where the troll gets the supermodel.



04

» With real conviction, Superfrog gives the princess a smacker right on her massive lips. Is the princess actually with it? Are we the only ones to have noticed that her face hasn't actually moved a millimetre in the last four frames of animation?



05

» Ah, see what they've done here? In the original tale, the kiss turns the frog back into his regal self, but here the princess gets turned into a frog. The prince doesn't look too pleased, unlike the princess. Seriously, has she been lobotomised?


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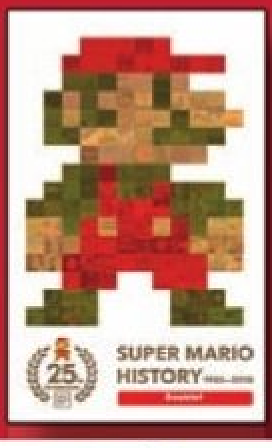
















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